THE ROUGHNECK

ROBERT W. SERVICE

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A William Fox Production. *The Rot*

LOVE'S AWAKENING ON THE SHORES OF TAHITI.

THE ROUGHNECK

BY

ROBERT W. SERVICE

AUTHOR OF

THE SPELL OF THE YUKON, Etc.

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A WILLIAM FOX PRODUCTION

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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PUBLISHED AUGUST, 1924

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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BOOK I.—THE BRUISER

CHAPTER I

TOM AND JERRY

1.

OLD Tom Delane put down his *Christian Science Monitor*, and fell to polishing his spectacles with a corner of the table-cloth. He was a neat, spare, toil-worn man, with white hair and a look of mild intransigeance. Presently he glanced across the table at his nephew.

"What is it you're reading, sonny?"

Young Jerry Delane sat with his eyes glued on the page, his hands buried in his thick curls.

"A book on baseball, Uncle."

"Baseball! Sure now, that's nice discerning literature. That'll go far to make you President of this great and glorious republic."

"Baseball's a mighty important subject, Uncle Tom."

"I'm not denying it. Judging by the papers, it's *the* important subject. Wars may rage and pestilence ravage; thrones may fall and kingdoms perish; what does that matter beside the news that the Green-shirts have beaten the Blue-socks, or something of the kind?"

"Aw, Uncle! You've never played baseball."

"Haven't I, though—sixty-five years ago, in the streets of Dublin, only we called it 'rounders' in them days. Well, me lad, have your baseball, but it's not going to help you pass out of the High School this Fall."

The boy's face grew sober. "Don't worry, Uncle; I'll pass all right. You can bank on me. I won't throw you down."

"Sure, if you work as well as you play, the devil himself couldn't stick you. But mind now, I'm counting on a clean pass."

Jerry sighed. He closed his book and reached for another—algebra, this time. With an air of resolution he tackled it.

Old Tom put on his spectacles again and looked thoughtfully about the room. It was shabbily comfortable, backed with books, most of them on engineering and sociology. Presently his gaze rested on two portraits above the fireplace. One was of a man of about thirty-five with the face of a dreamer. The brow was finely intellectual, but the mouth lacked firmness. The other was of a woman of almost the same age. She had heaping hair and a face exquisite in contour. More striking, however, was her strange air of melancholy. It haunted her dark eyes and lurked in the drooping sweetness of her lips.

Old Tom's gaze lingered sadly on the two pictures; then he turned to the boy—their son. Thank God! on that bright face was no hint of the tragedy that had overshadowed his young life. Old Tom's look grew very tender. Finally he said:

"Jerry, when you pass out of the High School this Fall, how would you like to go to College?"

Jerry stared blankly. Old Tom went on:

"It's your father would have wished it. You want to do him proud."

"Father was an inventor, wasn't he?"

"Ay, and a genius. If he had his rights this day, it's the rich fortune would be coming to you."

"How's that?"

"He was robbed. When it came to business, he had no

more brains than a child. He trusted his partner, who took out the patents in his own name and got your father to sign all kinds of papers. I don't know the ins and outs of it; but in the end this man got control of everything. It broke your father's heart."

(Old Tom did not mention, however, that the brilliant Desmond Delane, in his exaltations and despairs, found a ready excuse for the glass. Indeed, it was after a long bout with John Barleycorn he contracted the pneumonia that so swiftly finished him.)

"Yes," he went on, "your father died without a dollar, and the other man's a multi-millionaire."

"Who is he?"

"Well, why shouldn't I tell you? It's old Austin."

"Not Stillwell Austin, the rubber-man?"

"That's him. Commonly known as 'Stealwell Austin.' It was your dad made the foundation of his fortune. He's retired now, and, like all good Americans, gone to live in Paris."

Jerry was staring thoughtfully at the two pictures.

"And my mother? Isn't she in France, too?"

"Yes," said old Tom shortly. He always showed a certain reluctance in talking of the boy's mother. This time, however, Jerry was not to be put off.

"How is she? Is she well?"

"She was—the last time I heard. You see, I don't get letters very often, she not speaking English at all and having to write in a foreign tongue. It's hard. . . ."

Rather vaguely the old man broke off. Jerry gazed wistfully at the picture of his mother. A long silence.

2.

Old Tom was thinking of how he found her sick almost

to death in a New York hospital. She knew no one, and spoke only a few words of English. He heard of her by an accident, and arrived from Chicago at the eleventh hour.

Desmond Delane had met her while on a tramp in Brittany. She came of a very old family ruined by the Revolution,—the last of her race, poor and alone in the world. She had been brought up in a convent, and after coming of age had remained there, giving lessons to the younger girls. Indeed, she had made up her mind to take the veil when Delane appeared on the scene.

After that it was a kind of dream to her, his ardent wooing, their coming to America. She asked no questions and would have followed him to the ends of the earth. A child in her ignorance of the world, he tried to keep her so. He even discouraged her in her efforts to learn the language. He would be her interpreter. In a few years, he told her, they would go back to France, and it would not matter.

It was this idea of returning to her own land that reconciled her to the loneliness of an exile. Then the baby came, and consoled her for the frequent absence of her husband. Delane told her none of his troubles. He kept away from her during his drinking spells, so that to the last she suspected nothing.

All he left her was his debts. Homeless, helpless, with her baby she was left to face the world. How she survived the next three years was known only to herself. Her one idea was to return to her country, and she got as far as New York. She worked in sweating-dens and factories till her health failed. Then there came a day when something in her head seemed to snap. Holding her boy tightly by the hand, she went down to where the steamer was leaving for France. . . . Next day there was a small paragraph in the papers telling how a woman with a child had thrown

herself in the river just after the French boat had gone. Luckily they had been rescued. The woman had been taken to a hospital; the child was being cared for.

It was through this paragraph that Tom Delane came to know and hurried to the rescue. He took charge of the boy, but for a time he had to send the mother to a nursing-home. Her nostalgia persisted, so that when she grew strong enough the doctor thought it best she should return to her own country. She was to be gone only a year, and Tom was to look after the boy. . . .

Well, twelve years had passed, and still she had not come back.

3.

Old Tom broke the silence.

"How about it, sonny? How about College? I've heard you say you'd like to be a mechanical engineer."

Jerry drew a deep sigh. "But what about the money?"

"Oh, we'll manage that. We haven't got stuck so far."

But he, too, was thinking: What about the money? . . . There were his books. He must have spent over two thousand dollars on them. Second hand they might fetch four hundred. He could still borrow a few hundred on his insurance policy. Yes, they would fix it somehow.

However, it was Jerry who settled the matter. He rose suddenly.

"No, I can't let you do it, Uncle Tom. You've done too much for me as it is. It's I should be helping you instead of you slaving to help me. You think I don't know how you've scraped and pinched and all that. . . . I do, and I'm terribly grateful. But it can't go on. I want to go to College. It's my dream. But I won't go till I can pay my own way. When I get through High this Fall I want you to get me a job in one of the shops. I'm sixteen now.

I'll save, and by the time I'm twenty I should be able to manage it. It's best that way."

"Maybe you're right," said old Tom, bright-eyed.

"I know I am. I want to be a credit to you. I want to take care of you as you've taken care of me. And I want to go to France and bring back my mother. Then we'll live together, the three of us, all happy."

Old Tom blinked behind his spectacles.

"All right, Jerry. You're young and strong and keen. You ought to go far. Quit that baseball game, and some day you'll be a big man. Maybe you'll be big enough, even, to go up to old Stealwell Austin and tell him you're your father's son, and that he's a dirty crook, and for all his money old Tom Delane wouldn't wipe his boots on him."

CHAPTER II

CATASTROPHE

1.

THE General Manager of the Orion Safe Works touched the buzzer that communicated with the outer office. A youth immediately answered.

"Tell Mr. Stevens I want to see him."

In a few minutes a gray-bearded man appeared. The General Manager handed him a telegram.

"There you are. Another S.O.S."

Stevens was head of the shop where time-locks and combinations were made. He read:

"Can't open safe. Send expert at once—Cashier, First National Bank, Leapoldsville, Ohio."

"Some blasted fool muddled his numbers!" went on the General Manager. "Well, you'll have to send old Ericson as usual."

But Stevens was scratching his head. "Hum! That's awkward. Ericson's off with the 'flu.'"

"Then the next best."

"I don't know of anyone, unless . . ."

"Unless who?"

"There's a young feller we got in the shop. Say, he's a wonder. Been with us only three years, but what he don't know about combinations ain't worth knowing."

"How old is he?"

"Goin' on twenty. A born mechanic. Why, he's got

old Ericson skinned. I'll back him to find out any combination inside of half an hour."

"I guess we'll have to try him out. Let him catch the first train. Tell him to look as old as possible. By the way, what's his name?"

"Jerome Delane."

"Seems familiar."

"Yep. We had his uncle, old Tom, working for us last Fall. A first-class hand, but one of them crazy Communists. He was making the men discontented, so we sacked him."

"Right. A boss can't employ a man that's all the time hollerin', 'To hell with all bosses!' Well, if you're sure, let Delane do it."

The General Manager turned to his desk, and Stevens hurried to the shop. A tall lad was bending over a brass-turning machine. He had a blunt nose, a long upper lip, deep-set eyes, and dark hair curling from the roots. There was a clean swiftness about him that suggested the athlete.

"Quit that, Jerry. I want you to catch the next train for Leapoldsville. Them ginks in the bank down there have a lock-out. Reckon it's only a combination job, but if you have to drill, wire and I'll send down an outfit."

So young Delane doffed his greasy overalls, donned his Sunday suit, swung on to the express for Ohio, and arrived at his destination, where a distracted Cashier looked at him dubiously.

"We sent for an expert."

"Aw right. What's your trouble?"

"Can't get into number four. The President blames it on the mechanism, but I guess he's got his numbers mixed. The teller's been making out with borrowed cash."

As young Delane stood before that baffling safe there came to him a sense of importance. There was the staff,

crowding round, looking at him hopefully, eagerly. With a frown that covered his cheerful confidence, he bent over the gleaming disc. With infinite delicacy he worked the knob, and silent with suspense they watched him. The President wiped a perspiring brow. . . . What a pity if they had to drill . . . or to blow out the door. . . . Was this young man really capable?

Suddenly Jerry straightened. He enjoyed a dramatic moment. Then he turned the twinkling handle, and as if by magic the steel door swung open.

How they all shook hands with him! The President wanted to stand him a dinner; but Jerry caught the next train back, for he was due that afternoon to play in a baseball match.

2.

Such was the first of many similar scenes, for old Ericson died of the "flu," and Jerry got his job. An enviable job, too, but it had its drawbacks. For one thing, it interfered with his duty as captain of the company's baseball team. The Orions were the champions of the Eastside, and he was their bright particular star. He had played baseball ever since he could remember, and now it almost broke his heart to think he must give it up. But he never knew when he might be called away. S.O.S. signals took no account of week-end matches. Twice he had failed his team, and as he kicked his heels at some God-forsaken junction the Orions had gone down to defeat.

Of course, there was another side to it. His pay had been more than doubled, and this at a time when his uncle was bad with rheumatism. Old Tom's hands were swollen almost to deformity.

"Me poor boy," he said one evening, looking at them despairingly, "I don't believe I'll ever do a tap of work

again. It's a burden on you I am. Sure I wish I was dead."

"Aw, get off with you, Uncle. What about that caretaker's job you were after?"

"Nothing doing. They don't want a Socialist. No, I don't care about meself, but I'm troubled about you, sonny. It's taking all you make to keep the home going."

"Never worry about me. I'm proud to be doing my turn. You suppose I don't know how you slaved and stinted for me? What sort of a guy d'ye think I am, anyhow?"

Sorrowfully the old man regarded his swollen knuckles. "It's of your education I'm thinking. . . . You can't save money the way I am, and I know you're dead set on going to College."

"That's all right, Uncle. I'll work the harder. I'll manage somehow."

He gnawed the end of the pen he was holding. Old Tom sighed drearily.

"Well, life's been a hard drill, and I won't be sorry when me time's up. But what is it you're writing?"

"My resignation as captain of the ball team. Listen! There's the postman at the door."

Old Tom rose and returned with the letter.

"It's for you, Jerry."

"For me! Yes, it's . . . why, what do you think it is, Uncle?"

"Dunno."

"An offer from the Rovers, to play for them this season. Attractive salary. A professional engagement. Hurrah! When business interferes with baseball, give up business."

"It's a scheme," said old Tom; "a plot to get your job. Don't have anything to do with it. The only way to make money is to work hard for it."

"Hard work hasn't got you very far, Uncle."

"I know it. But I'd rather be poor and honest than rollin' in me limousine by exploitin' me fellow-men."

"Well, if it isn't a fake—if I can get a guaranteed contract . . ."

"I don't like it, me boy. Something tells me it's going to turn out bad. Better stick to your job."

"And stick in the hole the way we are. . . . At least let me look into the thing."

The result of his inquiries was that he wrote his letter of resignation after all, but it went in to the Orion Safe Works. Henceforth the shop knew him no more, and on his first appearance in a big match the workers turned out in their hundreds to cheer him.

3.

"The big guys want you up there, Jerry," said a fellow-player. "Guess they're going to raise you a hundred per."

Jerry was in the midst of morning practice. He laughed and hurried happily to the office. There he found awaiting him three officials—the President, the Treasurer, and the Secretary. By their deadly seriousness he knew that something was wrong.

"Close the door, Delane."

Jerry did so; then McQuade, the President, a coarse, corpulent man, took him by the arm and pushed him into the inner room. In a corner was the safe in which the gate-money was kept. It had been broken open.

"Well," said McQuade sharply, "what d'ye know about that?"

The three men, their faces very grim, were staring at him.

Jerry, a tall stripling, fresh with exercise, looked at them wonderingly.

A tense silence.

"Better make a clean breast of it," snapped McQuade.

It was as if the lad had been struck a blow. He grew pale, swallowed hard. Finally his voice came.

"I don't quite get you."

"Aw! Come off!" snarled the President. "You look as innocent as hell, you do. Let me wise you up. That safe's been cracked, and over thirteen thousand bucks taken. What have you got to say?"

"You mean . . . you suspect me?"

"You're some good little guesser, ain't you?"

"But . . . what reason have you?"

"In the first place, you have been heard to brag, the safe ain't made you couldn't open in half an hour. Is that so?"

Was that all? Resentment flamed in him.

"I don't know about bragging, but if I'd wanted to open that safe I wouldn't have made such a rotten job of it. Anything else?"

"Just this: we searched all the lockers and in yours we found a bunch of the notes. We can swear to them because some of them were marked."

Fear fell on Jerry. "It's a frame-up," he gasped.

"Indeed," sneered Gellatly, the lean-faced, spectacled Secretary. "Who do you suppose would frame up a job like that on you? Have you any enemies?"

"None that I know of."

"Anyone you might suspect?"

"No."

"Come, come. Better be frank with us, Delane. No one knows yet outside this office."

"Yes," growled McQuade, his red face lowering, "we

don't want any fuss. Blow back the stuff, and we'll hush the whole thing up."

"But I didn't take it. I swear before God I didn't."

Then his rage rose and he turned furiously on the President.

"You damned swine! If you say I took your dirty money, I'll choke you. . . ."

McQuade put the table between them.

"I told you so," he said to the others. "He's got it all snugly cached. Thirteen thousand! Worth going to the pen for! Well, let things take their course. Skeeter, 'phone to the police, will you?"

Spencer Simms, commonly called "Skeeter," was the President's nephew. He crossed to the telephone, but hesitated, his hand on the receiver. For a moment he regarded Jerry with doubt and pity in his gaze. He made a gesture of protest.

"Don't let's be too hasty," he said. "The evidence is purely circumstantial. Young Delane has a clean record. As for finding that money in his locker, it might have been found in my desk—or even in yours, Gellatly."

"You're too damned personal," snapped the Treasurer, who disliked Simms intensely. "Look here, Delane, you said that if you had wanted to open this safe you could have made a better job of it. What exactly did you mean?"

"I could have opened it by turning the combination."

"An interesting accomplishment. And how did you acquire it?"

"Honestly. I worked for three years in the shops of the Orion Safe Works."

"Humph! This is an Orion safe," sneered Gellatly.

"Do you know this safe?" asked Simms gently.

"Yes."

"Could you have opened it by finding the combination?"

"About as easily as you could open that door."

"And if it had been time-locked?"

"Then . . . well, I'd have had to open it the way you see."

"It *was* time-locked," jeered Gellatly.

Simms shrugged his shoulders. He seemed about to add something when the President, who had been gnashing his teeth like an old boar, broke in:

"Say, Skeeter, if you're too soft-hearted to 'phone, I will."

He took down the receiver and called. Simms went over to Jerry.

"I don't believe you did it, Delane. Things look against you, but your innocence will come out. Don't get down-hearted. I'll help you all I can."

Alas! his kindly efforts proved unavailing. The other two officials were most vindictive. In one morning they had lost a pretty sum of money and the best recruit of the season. They pressed the charge relentlessly. Jerry had been seen about the premises the night before; he had admitted an intimate acquaintance with that particular brand of safe; some of the money had been found in his locker. A bad combination! Added to that, the Judge was a personal friend of the President.

So the result was that at the age of twenty, Jerry Delane was sentenced to the penitentiary for a term of three years.

"Even at that," sniffed Gellatly, "he's making money at the rate of four thousand a year. More than most of us get."

But Skeeter Simms sighed.

"You'll never make me believe that boy did it," he said with conviction.

CHAPTER III

DASHER DELANE

1.

JERRY DELANE went to prison a bewildered boy, he came out of it an embittered man.

And in the years that followed bitterness became ingrained in him. He looked on life with a growing grudge. Nowhere, it seemed, was there a place for him.

Physically, too, he had changed. His fresh color had vanished, and in its place was a clear pallor that gave a piercing quality to his deep-set eyes. His gaze was of somber defiance, as if he neither asked aid nor sought sympathy. His mouth shut tight as a trap; his lean jaws were square as if they had been blocked in wood.

Such the Jerry Delane of twenty-three, as spurred by a demon of unrest he roamed from Maine to Mexico. And for two years he wandered, making enough to keep him as he moved from place to place. The stars of the wilderness lit his lonely trails and the silent places knew his solitary fires. The forest was his friend, while in the serenity of mountains he found peace. Only in cities was he unhappy.

Reading was his greatest solace. He read books he had always wanted to read, books he could stuff in his pockets and devour as he walked. In this way he came to know Carlyle, Emerson, Whitman. Books were his only companions, for men found him morose. As for women, he rarely looked a woman in the face.

It was on the San Francisco water-front he broke into the fighting game. 'Frisco fascinated him, woke a long-

ing for still wider horizons. And living was easy. By working one day he could gain enough for three. No needless toil for him. Society would get no more out of him than he could help. So there he lingered, loafing on sunny wharves, reading books on Socialism, and dreaming not a little.

He used to eat at a "pork and beanery" much favored by the rag-tag of the Ring. He found there lean lads and battered bruisers, eager to fill in the fag-end of a program. However, there was always an opening for a hefty youth willing to be hammered. Jerry had no science, but he had strength and grit. So he agreed to stand up to the Terror of Tacoma, and for four rattling rounds the Terror pounded him to a pulp.

Jerry did not like this at all. In his heart he felt he was the better man, and when it was over he did some thinking. In the end he took counsel of Chick Hegan, a grizzled flyweight of the old school. Chick had ropy muscles and was slippery as an eel. A foxy fighter.

Chick sized up Jerry and saw possibilities. He noted the fine shoulder-spread, the barrel chest, the ridged stomach muscles. Chiefly he marked the fighter's jaw, and the still flame in the deep-set eyes. Jerry was snug for his height, and suggested pent-up force.

"Sure ye've got the purty carcase, an' I'll make ye the foinest foightin' man wist of the Rockies," was Chick's conclusion. A month later a revenge match with the Terror was billed. It went three rousing rounds; Jerry was gloriously aggressive, and amid the roaring of a monster crowd put his man down for the count.

"The best bout of the evening," chuckled O'Grady, the rubicund referee. "Some find, that kid. All guts and punch. Say, did you get that spring of his, like an explosive force? We got to get a name for this lad. Dasher

Delane? How would that do? Good! Dasher Delane goes. He'll never make a boxer, but, by gosh! he'll be some grand slugger."

O'Grady, however, was wrong. In science Jerry made amazing progress. Chick saw to it that he was matched against the right men. Every week he fought, often a victory, sometimes a draw, never a defeat. And each time there was a notable improvement in his style, neater footwork, cleaner hitting, quicker judgment. His defense was finer than his attack. He had that intuitive sense seen only in the best boxers—instinctively he seemed to divine a blow and dodge it. Soon, indeed, his boxing began to be noted, and he was often cheered for a pretty bit of work.

He made a fine figure in the ring, too, lean and rangy, with long reach and head held high. And he fought with a disdain that was infinitely galling. This proud manner often nettled the other man. Then Jerry's smile would grow more scornful. Ducking, clinching, weaving in and out, he gave the impression of playing with his opponent.

Sometimes the audience saw this and resented it. "Set up!" they would yell; but Jerry would only grin sourly. Once, however, he lost his temper and leapt up between rounds, shaking his fist at the crowd. "If it's fighting you want," he shouted, "let any two men in the audience get into this ring and I'll fight them. You've paid to see a boxing match, not a bloody mill."

"That's the lad all over," said Chick. "He's proud and mortal quick to anger; but when it comes right down to cases the divil himself couldn't get his goat."

2.

Jerry was always bitter and melancholy, a Hamlet of the Ring. Yet he realized the romance of it, its call for

clean courage. He was chivalrous and liked his fellow fighters. From being billed as a "special," he advanced to the dignity of a "main eventer." He was spoken of as a possibility for the middle-weight championship of the West. Certain big promoters had their eyes on him. Then Chick began to get ambitious.

"We've got to conquer the East, me boy. Billy Hansen of Cleveland wants you on his string. There's the chance of yer life."

But Jerry shook his head. The East had too many painful memories for him. In the West his past was not likely to be raked up.

"Why won't ye go? There's easy money waitin'. Chicago, Noo York, they want to see you. It's up to you."

"Nothing doing."

"What's the matter wid ye, Jerry? One'd think ye was scared to go back."

"You've said it, Chick, I'm scared. If you must know, I'm in wrong back there. Did three years in the pen."

"Aw! Ye're jokin'."

"Devil a bit. But you needn't think I did what they jugged me for. Some lousy rat put the job on me."

"God curse his soul!" growled Chick. "And have ye no notion who was the man?"

"No. If I had . . . I'd kill him."

"I believe ye would. For yer own sake I hope ye'll never find him."

"Well, anyway, you know now why those tempting offers don't look so good to me. As long as I'm a second rater I'm safe."

"Pity ye didn't change yer name. . . . I tell you what, Jerry, we'll take a trip to Australia. It's the finest sportin' country on earth. We'll do a tour over there."

"Now you're talkin," said Jerry. "Australia goes."

CHAPTER IV

THE TROPIC TRAIL

1.

A MONTH later they sailed second class for Sydney. About midway they stopped for twenty-four hours at Papeete. As they passed the opening in the reef the sharks followed them in. Leaning over the rail the two men watched the gray shadows gracefully circling in the clear lagoon. Although it was just six in the morning a sense of inexhaustible heat came to them. Then from the roaring whiteness of the reef they turned to look at the land.

It seemed to leap at them in the eager appeal of its beauty. Through the crystal clearness the velvety shores were radiant with joy and color. Those pale groves must be coconut palms. Down to the beach they thronged, leaning over the water and fluttering a frivolous welcome. Behind them were tenebrous mountains matted with jungle. It was a steep land, smothered in greenery. Its violent verdure cataracted down the flanks of the hills, and petered out in those pale flirtatious palms.

Along the beach road natives were coming to meet them —deep-bosomed women in flapping Mother Hubbards, and muscular men in white duck. And no one seemed to hurry. There in that voluptuous land even their eagerness was restrained.

Yet the brown faces that massed the wharf were full of joyous welcome. The teeth of the women gleamed in

smiles, and the eyes of the men were fiercely friendly. The acrid smell of copra assailed the nostrils, bringing a rich sense of the tropics.

"This damned heat!" grumbled Chick. "It's melting me spine. If we stay here long, there'll be nothing left of me."

"Good job if you sweat out some of the whisky. You certainly punished enough of it on the voyage."

Chick's weakness in that direction was a sore point between them. He kept drawing his forefinger across his brow and shaking from it a little stream of perspiration. But the abstemious Jerry was in no such discomfort. The heat did not trouble him at all, and he gloried in the sunshine. He was as eager and excited as a boy. The romance of those ultimate islands had always appealed to him, and now it gave him a pure thrill. The spell of the South Seas was on him.

And when they went ashore, who would have dreamed that the town was so extensive. It was all so cunningly tucked away in that tangle of greenery. White roads laced the verdure, and cottages peered from it. Cascading roses hid roofs of corrugated iron, and climbing vines concealed frame walls. From flower-screened balconies women stared languorously. Their breasts were the golden yellow of ripe mangoes, their eyes lustrous. White blossoms starred the dusk of their hair. The men, with loincloths of scarlet and gold, were like bronze statues, magnificently muscular. To eyes so long accustomed to the monotony of sea and sky it was all gorgeous, scenic, bewilderingly beautiful.

But there was no time to seize its exotic appeal, for that night in the theater they sparred four rounds, to the wild excitement of a packed house. Jerry had a dazed vision of friendly brown faces floating in a foam of white.

They were as eager as children, and the fighting seemed to rouse them to a frenzy of delight. They showered wreaths on the boxers and pressed presents in their hands. It was hero-worship, joy unrestrained.

"Sure if ye was to bide for good they'd make a god of ye," said Chick.

"I like the place," said Jerry. "Some day I'm coming back. It's a spot to drop out of the world into and begin all over. Seems to me if anyone had a heap of trouble they might forget it here. Ay, if a man had never known much happiness in the hard old world outside, he might come to Tahiti and find it at last."

"Well, ye can have my share of it," said Chick. "The hard old world looks pretty good to me right now. I wouldn't give a bit of the Barbary Coast for all the South Sea Islands on the map. Say, if I stayed here for long I'd lose my grip, become a bloody beachcomber. After all they're only a bunch of niggers, and the country's not clean. It's not a white man's country. No, sir, I'll be right glad when we get to Sydney."

2.

It was during the ten days between Papeete and Sydney that Jerry came to realize the disrepute of his calling. Among the second-class passengers were a Mrs. Mostyn and her two daughters. The mother had spoken of Jerry as "nice." He was so quiet, shy, respectful, with an interesting face and a gift of listening. He appealed to the daughters as six feet or more of straight, clean manhood. The girls were pretty, the old lady sweet; he liked them.

Then came the boxing-match, and though the majority looked on him as a hero, the Mostyns put up a gentle yet

firm barrier of reserve. It really didn't matter, but—it hurt.

Here it was he took his first distaste to his profession. From then on he was to accept it with resignation and pursue it with rancor. Indeed, in the months that followed he fought bitterly and with increasing disgust. His fellow-pugilists he liked; they were fit, fearless, unflinching; but the others, the patrons and parasites of the game, for them he had only contempt.

Once between rounds he realized this keenly. They were sponging the blood from his face when he happened to cast his eyes around the ring. There they were, these greasy sports, rooting for their man. He saw their gloating faces —pimply faces of vicious youths, gross faces of overfeeding morons. The sight of blood made them thirst for more. And it was for these brutes he was giving his strength, his skill, his youth. Why, the fellow in the other corner, ring-rat though he was, was a gentleman compared with the best of that mob. Poor devil! they were giving him brandy, rubbing his stomach, patching him up for another round. The crowd must have its money's worth. His heart went out to that other fellow. Ay, even as he rained blows on him and drove him blinded to the floor he almost loved him. But God! how he hated that mob.

The Australian trip was an indifferent success, though on the whole it added to his prestige. He won four matches and drew two. Then the season came to an end, and with it their tour. Chick was for returning to the States, but Jerry had become strangely sullen.

"No, I won't go back, not just yet. How much money have we?"

"About four hundred pounds."

"Well, then, let's go to London and Paris. Maybe

we'll pick up something there. Anyway, now I'm started on this traveling stunt, I just want to keep a-going."

"London's all right," grumbled Chick; "but France! That's no good. What d'ye want to go to a country for, where ye can't speak the lingo?"

Jerry's face was grave. "For a very good reason. I want to see my mother."

"Your mother! I didn't know your mother was living."

"Yes . . . she's French."

"They're great women, the French," commented Chick tactfully. "Finest women on earth. And the Irish are the finest men. Sure ye're well sprung, me lad."

"Yes," Jerry went on; "mother came to America, but she always hated it. Never learned to speak English. Only she adored my father. She'd have gone with him to the heart of desolation."

"Some women are like that," said Chick; "mighty few, I'm thinkin', though."

"Father was an inventor and a genius. But he had a partner who handled the business end. This man took advantage of his ignorance, sucked his brains dry, threw him down."

"The dirty blackguard!"

"Father died penniless. Then this man came to mother, who was destitute. She pleased him. A bit of a beauty she was, so he offered to pension her . . . on condition. You know what I mean. Mother was terrified. She fled with me. We lived in the slums of New York, and how she held out God only knows! When Uncle Tom found her she was a wreck. She got a bit better physically, but . . . there remained a fear of the States that almost amounted to horror. So Uncle Tom sent her back to her native place. She was to return in a year. Well, twenty-one have gone, and she's still there."

"Do you hear from her?"

"Not often. I send all the money I can. She's being well looked after. I get letters, but they're in French, and I can't read them myself. You see, it's so long ago. People sort o' drift apart. I've had such a lot of trouble, and I haven't thought of her so much as I ought. But lately I've been thinking more, somehow. Anyway, I want to see her, and I'm going back. It's an ache that keeps getting worse."

"And the man that was the causing of it all?"

"Oh, he's gone on prospering. Guess he could live like a lord on the interest from his interest."

"Well, if ye don't want to be tellin' me his name I'm not after askin'."

"It's Austin. Stillwell Austin."

"Not the Sinator!"

"Ay. If ever I run across that man, it's the hard reckoning we'll have."

"It's wonderful," said Chick, "what a lot of evil a man can do in this world and be respected for it. And 'twas yer uncle that saved ye both?"

"Yes. Somehow he managed to give me an education. Put me through High School. Wanted to put me through College too, but there I kicked. Said I'd earn enough to put myself through. Well, when one's not turned twenty, saving money's harder than attending early Mass. Then the love of sport was strong in me. I was always a great ball-player, and in the end it got me. But back of my success I hugged the idea that I'd get a College education, break away from this roughneck stuff. You know what I mean?"

"Sure I do," said Chick. "Am I not makin' a dintist of me sister's son?"

"I thought that after a season or two of professional

baseball I might have enough to break away on. I don't know, though. It's fierce how that game gets you. Maybe I'd have hung on. Anyway, the thing happened that you know of."

Jerry paced the shabby hotel bedroom. His face was twisted, his hands clenched till the knuckles showed white.

"Just think of it, man. Me, an innocent lad that never thought anything evil in my life—far less did anything dishonest—shut up three years with the scum of the earth; let loose at last with the brand of the brute on me, a convicted criminal, a man ruined, accurst, abhorred . . . and innocent, *innocent!* Can you wonder I'm bitter? Can you wonder I hate society, hate everybody, hate at times even you, Chick, that, after old Tom, has been my best friend?"

His deep-set eyes burned in his pale face, and his mouth quivered with emotion.

"Where's old Tom?" said Chick, wishful to change the subject.

"In a pauper's grave. Died while I was in prison. He took it bad. Couldn't get over it. Well, that's that. 'Tain't often I loosen up. It hurts too much. And now you know why I want to go to France. I want to see my mother, to comfort her if I can. I've got an ache at the heart, and it grows and grows."

CHAPTER V

THE MATCH

1.

ON the long voyage between Sydney and Southampton his aversion to his calling came to a climax. Dislike deepened to disgust. He was going to London to fight, and already he had lost all heart for the fighting. He cursed himself for a fool, but there the feeling was. He hated the Ring, and, in spite of all its inducements, he felt he could not go on much longer.

"I'm sorry for you, Chick," he said. "You'll think me a yellow dog, but I can't help it. I'm going to throw you down."

"What! You're not going to quit?"

"You've said it. I'm all fed up. The sight of a pair of gloves makes me sick."

"That'll pass. It's because you've not had 'em on for so long. Once ye get with the old crowd the fightin' heart'll come back to you. We'll go to the country for a spell and train up, then you'll feel quite different. Ye mustn't quit, Jerry. You're too good a man. Sure I was bred in the game, and I know. It's you for a champion's belt, me boy, if ye just leave it to an old bird that can handle you right."

Jerry sighed. "I know, Chick. It means a whole lot to us, and I'll try. But God! man, you don't realize how I feel. And there's another thing: if I go on, there'll be more and more publicity. Then some day someone will find out I've done time, and that'll be hell for me. You know what I was thinking just this very morning? . . . I

was thinking how nice it would be to cut it all out, this scrapping business, to buy a bit of land in Australia and turn farmer. Get in touch with the soil, that's what I want. There's peace for me there, and happiness. Maybe a wife too, and a bunch of kids. Oh, I'd make them happy, I would, and no one 'ud ever know."

"Forget it, Jerry. That's a dub's game. It'll never get ye nowhere. Sure ye don't want to be a hayseed when ye might be havin' yer name in all the papers, and the crowd worshippin' ye, and you with a diamond in yer shirt as big as a pea-nut. Leave it to yer Uncle Chick, Jerry. Ye've got the stuff in ye, and if ye can kape yer heart up I'll make a champion of ye yet."

2.

Jerry made an effort. Physically he got back into form, morally he was hopeless. He fought with brilliant indifference. Oh, for a dash of red rage, of fiery ecstasy! But no, he was like a machine, cold, calculated, correct. His work was faultless, but there was nothing vital in it, nothing human. He never surprised you, never made you stand up and forget yourself. Always a "pale" fighter, he seemed more emotionless than ever. He boxed too well to lay himself open to punishment. No one could lash him into a fury; no one could "get his goat."

The result was disastrous. He fought a number of draws, and the public began to tire of him. They felt he was not giving them value for their money. He was no longer "Dasher" Delane. He was Dainty Delane, Delicate Delane—anything you like but "Dasher." Then, too, they happened on a time when boxing was at a low ebb and purses were small. So the day came when no more matches were to be made and funds were alarmingly low. Indeed,

come to figure it up, they had not enough to take them back to the States.

Jerry did not seem to care when Chick revealed to him the state of their finances. Perhaps he saw in this situation a way of escape. Perhaps he was glad they could not go back. All he said was:

"Anyway, we'll have enough to take us to Paris, and I'll see my mother."

"And what's goin' to happen to us over there? We'll get stranded."

"Oh, something will turn up. Maybe we'll make a match. They say there's a boxing boom in France. Anyway, I'm going."

When Jerry made up his mind there was no changing him. So Chick bought two second-class tickets, and that evening found them parading the Parisian boulevards. It was strange to Jerry, this being for the first time in a country where he could not speak the language, bewildering and a bit exasperating. All the more so when he reflected that he himself was half French. Perhaps he should have had strange intimations of that past where his forefathers had played their parts—strange feelings of familiarity and so on. But he had none of these. In truth, he as well as Chick was very much lost, very much worried.

So they took rooms at the Grand Hotel, where they could meet many Americans, and every day their slender stock of money shrank alarmingly. Then when they had changed their last five-pound note and things were at their blackest, one evening Chick burst into Jerry's room. His small, wrinkled face was fiery red, his blue eyes were dancing. Between its two ridges of grayish white hair his bald head was covered with tiny blobs of perspiration.

"I've made a match, Jerry," he cried. "We're saved."

"Who is it?"

"Tiger Morrissy. He's here in Paris, and wants to meet a "comer-on" at the Paree Sirk next Saturday night—someone he can get a decision over. I met his manager in the Chatham bar, and he thought you'd do. You see, you've not been fighting very well lately, and it looks as if ye might be an easy mark. It's his dayboo in Paris, and he's got to have a smashin' victory."

"You mean Mike Morrissy, of the Bronx."

"That's the man. Used to be Ike Morris. All them Sheenys turn into Micks once they take up the scrapping business. But the Tiger's a wonderful fighter, even if he is a Jew. He's got the goods."

"I don't know. I don't like taking on anyone who comes from New York State."

"We can't afford to be too particular. We've got to take a chance, Jerry. Columbus took a chance. Here we are down to bedrock. The Tiger's a good ten pounds heavier than you, and you're not in the best of shape, but we're up against it."

"What's in it?"

"Two thousand francs—the loser's end, I mean."

"What's the winner's end?"

"Eight thousand. The Tiger's manager won't take less. A ten thousand purse and a win for the Tiger."

"A 'set up.' "

"It's all in the business."

"You know I've never faked a fight yet."

"We're in debt. We can't foot the bill at this fancy hotel."

"The Tiger thinks it's a sure thing, thinks I'm easy. You seem sure too, Chick; certain I'll be licked."

"You don't get it, Jerry. It's Tiger Morrissy, the real genuine Tiger of the Bronx."

"Seems rather to fancy himself, this Tiger."

"Sure he does. Why, there ain't but five between him and the Champ. You'd never get a match with him in the States. But it's here in Paris where it don't matter. He's the biggest man ye've ever met, and if ye get licked by him it's no disgrace."

"How many rounds?"

"It's billed to go fifteen, but the Tiger's willin' to let ye off easy. He'll let it go to the sixth, and then he'll finish ye, give ye the K.O. gentle-like. That's how he wants to fix it."

"He expects me to hang on for six rounds before he tucks me more or less softly to sleep?"

"You can do it. You can stand up to him for six rounds. And remember that the loser's end is . . ."

"I know," said Jerry thoughtfully. "But I'm not interested in the loser's end. It's the winner's end that interests me."

"Whut! Ye don't think ye've a chance at that, the way ye've been fightin' lately?"

"Chick, I'll hand it to you for a first-class discourager. I'm ashamed of you the way you seem to have lost confidence in me lately."

"I haven't, Jerry, but . . ."

"See here, Chick, there's my watch. It's gold. Pawn it and put what you get on me. Get the best odds you can. Then there's that bum diamond you're flashing round—soak that too. Put every cent you can raise on me."

"You're off yer bean, Jerry!"

"Do what I tell you."

"I will if ye say so, Jerry."

"By God! I do say so. I'll meet the Tiger on Saturday week, and . . . I'll lick him. Get that. I'll lick him dirty. Now go and do what I tell you. Pawn the shirt on your back, Chick, and bet it on me for Saturday week."

CHAPTER VI

THE FIGHT

THE fight was billed for ten o'clock, and at half-past nine Chick found Jerry in his dressing-room. Clad in his bath-robe he was straddling a chair, a book in his hands. The bath-robe was an offensive shade of purple and Jerry hated it; but it had been a present from Chick, so he good-naturedly wore it on special occasions.

"And what are ye readin' at such a moment as this?" said Chick.

"Nothing that would interest you. It's called *Walden*, by a wise man named Thoreau. He turned his back on the world and lived alone with Nature."

"Huh! I call that looney."

"I wouldn't mind being called that if I could gain freedom and peace. No doubt he looked on us as lunatics."

"Why, there's potry in it," said Chick, peeping. "Fancy reading potry on the edge of a prize-fight."

"There's poetry in pugilism. A perfectly trained man's a poem."

"Well, then, you're a pome, Jerry. How are ye feelin'?"

"Physically fine, spiritually sick."

He threw off his bath-robe and stood in fighting kit. His skin was of a dazzling whiteness, and under it the muscles rippled. It was fascinating to see how they quivered, swelled, and rolled like live things under that covering of satin. His neck was long and sinewy, while his sloping shoulders had a superb spread. His abdominal muscles

were deeply defined. From ears to arms there was a splendid sweep, then a fine tapering to his feet. Every inch he was the modern gladiator, the scientifically trained man, more beautiful than the lump-limbed heroes of Greece and Rome, ay, more beautiful than any woman.

Chick regarded him critically.

"Them ten days of trainin's done wonders wid ye, Jerry. Never saw ye look fitter. But why did ye put on yer black silk shorts? Better yer green for the glory of old Ireland."

"Because I'll bet you ten dollars the Tiger boxes in green. Trust the Sheeny. He won't lose a chance of advertising his adopted nationality. No, I put on black because I felt as if I was going to a funeral, the interment of one, Jerry Delane, prize-fighter. Say, Chick, it's queer, but I've the strangest hunch something's going to happen to-night, something that's going to break me. I can't shake it . . ."

"Aw! Come off, Jerry. If ye feel like that ye're beaten before ye begin. Besides, it's all fancy. I had that feelin' before I whipped Spider Rafferty in thirteen rounds. The minute ye enter the ring ye'll forget it. . . . Why, Jerry, what does it matter after all? Even if ye do get licked this once, what's that? It ain't yer last fight, by a damn sight."

There was such a chirpy serenity in his manner that Jerry looked at him sharply.

"You've not been drinking again?"

"Honest to God, Jerry. Not a drop since dinner."

"You spoke of my being licked in such an airy way—just as if you didn't mind."

"Of course I mind, Jerry. . . . See, here comes the lad I've got to support you. Joey's his name."

Joey was a fat Cockney youth, with round, rosy cheeks, and an innocent smile.

"My word!" he said, "wot a 'ouse. Packed to the

bleedin' rafters and 'owlin' their 'eads off. Just bin watchin' two French fly-weights. Strike me stiff, if after tryin' to pound each other to pulp for ten rounds they didn't end wiv a 'ug and a kiss."

"Well, I'm afraid I can't see myself kissing the Tiger," said Jerry.

"The Tiger's a tough nut. He'll scale ten pounds more than you, but you've got 'im in the 'eight. I seen you fight in the Albert 'All an' I've got ten quid on you. Six to one, I got."

"You fixed up those bets, did you, Chick?" said Jerry sharply.

"Yes, Jerry, they're all fixed up. But come along now. They'll be waitin' for us in the scalin'-room."

The weighing was done by two Frenchmen. As Jerry stepped on the scales he heard one exclaim:

"*Mais il est bien, ce type la.*"

And the other:

"*Ben oui. Un beau gars.*"

"What are they saying?" he demanded of Joey.

"'Anged if I know. Sounds like they're callin' you a 'orrid nyme. Anyway it's all right. They don't mean no 'arm. Come on, now, let's get into the center of the bloomin' monkey show. Them Frenchies are fair frantic to see you."

Through a human thicket they pushed their way, and hundreds of faces turned to get a glimpse of them. Then Jerry was aware of a sound like the bellowing of a mighty surf. As he mounted the platform it swelled to a cataract roar. Never had he heard anything like it. They were applauding him, these strangers, acclaiming him with hand and tongue. He felt stirred, thrilled, abashed.

"They don't know," he was thinking, "I'm only a third-rater, or they wouldn't be cheering me like that. Well,

I'll try not to disappoint them. Maybe I'll give them as good a fight as one of the big 'uns."

Standing by the ropes in the far corner of the ring he looked round the house. It was a real circus and for that evening a platform had been put up in the center of the arena. Near and far, high and low, everywhere he turned, were eager, excited faces. They looked up at him from the ringside, they gazed from the boxes, they stared from the dimness of the *promenoir*. Ring above ring they rose, clear to the roof.

"They say there's twelve thousand in the 'ouse," said Joey, "and they 'ad to turn another three thousand away."

Alongside the ring were the Pressmen, weary, beery, cynical. Their shabby suits contrasted with the dinner jackets of the celebrities all about them. Just behind them in the boxes were beautiful women, whose capes of ermine and chinchilla thrown back, revealed dazzling arms, snowy bosoms, flashing jewels. They were the great cocottes, the mistresses of the gross, well-groomed men by their sides.

And now another burst of applause crashed out. It swelled to a mighty thunder. Peal after peal it rolled from ring to roof. The Tiger was mounting the platform. Surrounded by half a dozen admirers he bobbed his head to that glorious greeting. Quite at ease was the Tiger, seemed to take it all as his due. His thick lips parted in a gold-toothed grin, and his small eyes leered gratification. On his shoulders cape-fashion he had thrown a mauve dressing-gown quilted with scarlet satin. He took the chair in the corner, flung his arms over the ropes, and lounging back in the classic attitude, basked in the worship of the mob.

"Ye've lost yer bet," said Chick. "He's not wearing green trunks. They're white embroidered with harps and sprigged with shamrocks. But what a wop!"

Jerry nodded. He was duly appreciating the Tiger. The man had the face of a born fighter. His large nose, broken in battle, dominated it. His brows sloped back, and in their bony pits his steely eyes were quick and cruel. His lips looked swollen, so coarse and sensual were they. His chin was strong and deeply cleft, but sloped away like his brow. His ears flapped forward. His hair was cropped at the back, but long around the crown, a tufted effect, rather terrible in battle. His complexion was pasty and unhealthy.

As far as his face went the Tiger was certainly far from a beauty. But his body—that was beautiful. A good two inches shorter than Jerry, he made it up in breadth. Indeed, many would have preferred his stockier build to Jerry's rangy one. Yet with all the strength of muscles that bunched and corded under his sallow skin there was no suggestion of slowness.

"Swift as a flash," thought Jerry humbly. "Speed with strength and weight to back it. A better man than I am. Well, I'll do my best."

He had taken the chair in his corner and there he sat with a look of moody abstraction. It was that strange, sad, austere look one often sees in the face of a trained man before a fight. For the moment he seems exalted above all about him. In the midst of that mob Jerry was thinking of Walden pond and the sweetness of solitude. Absently he was aware that they were arranging the preliminaries, though he could not understand a word. Then the ring had been cleared and the Master of Ceremonies was introducing them.

"Tiger Morrissy, the coming champion of the world." The Tiger bobbed all round.

"Dasher Delane, fresh from his Australian triumphs." Jerry rose and sat down again. Joey was binding his

hands and wrists. Heavy shouldered men with battered faces and ill-fitting suits were climbing into the ring, and being introduced as challenging the winner. How they prolonged everything! He was burning with impatience to begin. Ah! Chick had won the choice for corners. Now he had picked up the gloves and was bringing them.

As they were tying on his gloves Jerry saw one of the Pressmen rise and make his way to where the Tiger was putting on his own bands. They talked for a moment, then for the first time the Tiger deigned to notice Jerry. He stood up and gave a long searching look at his opponent. With a nod to the other he sat down again.

"Who is that newspaper man?" said Jerry. "The tall one coming back to his place."

"Dunno; I'll ask," said Chick. Then he returned. "It's McGafney of the *Umpire*. The great McGafney. Don't know him, do you?"

"No, except that he used to report baseball for the New York papers."

"Well, he's got his eye on you, Jerry. Maybe he'll be the makin' of you."

But Jerry was none too pleased. The eye of McGafney was regarding him too intently for his liking. However, just then things began to move more swiftly. The speaker had climbed down, and the referee in his dinner jacket moved briskly to his place. The great roar of the mob sank to a hush of expectancy. These thousands of spectators seemed to be bending forward, watching every move of the fighters, as if the fate of nations depended on them.

"Seconds out of the ring! Time!"

There was the boom of a great gong, and the lights went down, leaving the place in semi-darkness. Only from overhead poured on the ring a glare—white, pitiless, all-revealing. It was most dramatic, the gong, the cleared stage,

the shadow, the hush, the brilliant ring . . . and in this tense moment Jerry threw off his robe and sprang to meet his man.

Briskly they came together. Jerry had his arms outstretched for the usual handshake, but the Tiger did not touch the extended gloves. Instead he looked at them with a sour grimace. Then before Jerry could recover from his amazement, before he could even get his guard up, the Tiger pivoted and swung a savage right to his jaw. It was a brutal blow, treacherous, terrific. In the stillness the thud of it was heard with sickening distinctness. With all the Tiger's weight behind it, it caught Jerry squarely and down he went.

Then the Tiger snarled something, but Jerry did not hear. He had fallen on his face, his arms outstretched. It seemed to him he was lying at the bottom of a dull gray sea whose waters weighed him down. He could hear the rumble as of waves, but he could not reach the surface. There were silver lights there. He must break through the shadowy waters and reach the light or he would perish. . . .

The crowd seemed petrified with surprise and indignation. Over that sprawling white body solemnly the referee was beginning to chant his measure of defeat. As if satisfied that his job was done the Tiger leaned on the ropes, a virtuous sneer on his face.

"*One—two* . . ."

Lights like stars seemed to swoop down on Jerry. They swirled around him, they danced about him. Suddenly he heard . . . *three—four*. . . . They were counting him out. He must rise . . . he must. He struggled to all fours. The crowd gasped and the Tiger straightened up. He collapsed, and the crowd groaned.

No, it was too much. Let them count. *Five* . . . *six*. . . . He was helpless. A knock-out . . . in the first round

too . . . disgrace . . . a dirty blow . . . he would let them pick him up and carry him to his corner. *Seven.* Oh, it was good to lie so peacefully. . . . It seemed as if he had been resting for hours. . . . *Eight.* . . . Ah! they were still counting. All at once he felt better and almost automatically he was on his knees. . . . *Nine.* . . . How the crowd cheered! . . . He was on his feet.

The Tiger had turned and was looking at him somewhat derisively. Jerry swayed helplessly, his hands by his sides. His eyes were closed, his mouth open. The Tiger had only to go in and topple him over again, do it for good this time. But somehow he hesitated. He sensed the hostility of the crowd. No, he would be generous, let the fight go on a little longer. So almost contemptuously he began to tap his victim with light blows. Jerry reeled under them. His head sank between his arched arms. Half cowering he allowed himself to be buffeted back to the ropes, and there he collapsed once more.

He rose on the count of seven. Oh, if he could only go the round! His strength was coming back, but he did not show it. Once more he let himself be mauled round the ring, swaying back on the ropes, twisting away with his body bent, his head hid behind his curved arms. Then when he could stand it no longer down he went again.

His ring cunning had come back to him, and his one thought was to gain time. He would take his full limit now, and at the call of nine he got to his feet. But the patience of the Tiger was exhausted. The Tiger knew that little game. He would soon end it. His thick upper lip turned in a snarl. He went in and swinging round a little, he drew back his right for another whizz to the jaw. It was like a butcher measuring his blow to fell an ox. Jerry saw it coming and knew he was done. . . .

"*Time.*"

Saved. For the moment at least. Chick and Joey had supported him to his chair, and there he lay with closed eyes and heaving chest. Oh, that delicious water on his brow, his body! Joey took a flask from his pocket.

"'Ere, take a swig o' this."

What it was he knew not, but it fired his veins, gave him new strength. Ah! if only he could stay the next round. Joey was fumbling at his right wrist where his bandage was fastened. How sweet was the respite! How he dreaded getting on his feet again!

Time.

Groggily he rose and put up his guard. He could use his legs now, those fine, shapely legs with their bands of steely muscle. He avoided the Tiger's rush and, falling into a clinch, hung on as if he loved the man. The Tiger was hammering him on the ribs, pounding his breath out. Limply he leaned forward, too feeble to strike in his turn. The referee had to separate them. He retreated, defending himself weakly at first, then more and more effectively. Blow after blow he blocked with his gloves. When he was cornered he fell into a clinch, but this time he guarded himself against those drumming short-arm jabs on the ribs. Yet half-way through the round he felt his strength going. The Tiger was gathering himself for a spring when the referee held up his hand and stepped between them. Somehow the bandage on Jerry's wrist had come undone. It was streaming down like a riband. In the full minute Joey took to adjust it, Jerry gathered strength, and he got through the round by falling into a series of clinches.

As he lay back in his chair for the second time he felt he was beginning to be master of himself. His breathing was easier, his brain clearer, his muscles moving more swiftly. He might make a real fight of it yet. He asked for nothing more.

"Here, give me another pull at that flask," he said to Joey.

"That's right," said the fat youth. "You're bucking up. If you can stand him off for another round you'll have a chance."

But the Tiger seemed determined Jerry should not go another round. He attacked furiously, driving his man with battering blows from corner to corner. Jerry warded them, his long body bent almost double, his head tucked in, his guard high. Several times he stopped a rush with his left arm stiffly extended. He was using all his knowledge of defense, and in his crouching position with his long reach, it was hard to hit him. Nevertheless, the Tiger managed to get in several whacking body blows, and Jerry staggered a bit. Then the Tiger rushed him, battering down his defense. Jerry retreated, but the Tiger was after him, raining down blow after blow. In spite of his fortitude he could not stand much more of that terrible punishment. Once again things were looking desperate.

In the front row of the ringside seats he had remarked a flashy female of the peroxide blonde type. His attention had been drawn to her by a remark from Joey: "Blimy, if the Tiger ain't brought 'is tart along." Now he heard her voice, high-pitched, nasal, screaming: "Attaboy! Hit 'im low, Mike. Get 'im in the basement. That's right. . . . Good old Mike. . . . Wallop the poor fish. . . . A knockout. . . . Kill 'im. . . . Kill 'im. . .!"

Jerry was backed up to where the blonde lady was shrieking, and the Tiger was pounding him with sledgehammer blows. Another moment and he knew he must go down. As he hung there, supported by the ropes, a thought came to him. He let the Tiger's next punch take him fair and square, so that it lifted him off his feet, and he shot

clear through the ropes and landed in a sprawling heap in the lap of the Tiger's lady friend.

She squealed and spat out curses like an angry cat, while from the crowd went up a delighted yell. As for the Tiger, he could only gasp and stare. Jerry was hoisted back into the ring, but the spell seemed broken. Tragedy had become comedy, and the Tiger finished up the round in a half-hearted fashion.

And now with every breath Jerry felt himself coming back.

"Keep on yer defense," warned Joey. "Maybe you'll lick 'im yet."

The next round Jerry abandoned his bent attitude. He stood up with his fists close to his body, his chin dipped in. This was his fighting position. He fought with his feet almost as much as his fists, with his head most of all. It was his leg-work saved him now, for he did not strike a blow. But he was as quick as a flash, side-stepping, ducking, darting back, dodging all over the ring. Once, indeed, he heard a disgusted voice demanding: "Say, is this a fight or a foot-race?"

The Tiger, put out by the mishap that had befallen his fancy friend, did not follow him up with his usual gusto, and the round was a tame one.

"You're all right again," said Joey in the interval. "You can hit him a bit this time. Tap him on the nose if you can. That's the weak spot of them Sheenys. Their nose bleeds easy. Once you can get it started, it'll worry him no end. Don't forget. Batter away at his beak."

Jerry did not forget. The Tiger began the round with a determined rush. It was the sixth, and he was not minded it should go beyond that. But he did not look for any aggressiveness on Jerry's part, and he exposed himself recklessly. Whack! A clean, crisp blow. Jerry's long left

delivered it, and it was the first he had struck since the commencement of the fight. It landed full on the Tiger's nose. Jerry heard the crack and leapt back to avoid a dangerous rush. But with what joy he saw the flash of red! Blood, and the Tiger's blood! It was trickling from his nostrils, making a red smear of his thick lips. The Tiger kept sniffing it up, but still it came. He tried to wipe it away with the back of his glove, and smudged it all over his face. He was a ghastly-looking sight, and what maddened him was to think that it was nothing. But it seemed bad, made him look like the loser instead of the winner. So sniffing and snorting he went at Jerry like an angry bull, though he now kept his face well guarded. When they finished the round, Jerry was beginning to feel rather pleased with himself.

"That was a tidy one you copped him," chuckled Joey. "Do it again. Rasp 'is mug in the clinch."

The Tiger rose with every trace of the damage washed away. His nose no longer bled. Jerry clinched; then as they broke he brushed his glove up the Tiger's bent face, grinding the features savagely. He had no compunction about this, for already the Tiger had tried the same thing with him. Ha! there he had the nose bleeding again. No doubt it distressed the Tiger. Once more his face was a gory mask, but what worried him still further was that Jerry was beginning to hit him. No light blows either; solid, resounding whacks. That long left kept shooting out with what seemed the speed and force of a bullet. The Tiger got a staggerer on the ribs, then a terrific jolt on the jaw. That is to say, it would have staggered a weaker man, but it only steadied the Tiger. He was more wary. He tempted Jerry to hit. He took a facer again, but at the same time made a vicious upper-cut to the chin. As Jerry jerked his head back, it missed by the fraction of an inch.

A William Fox Production. *The Forsaken.*

THINKING ONLY OF HER BOY'S FUTURE, ANNE DECIDES TO GO WITH MACARA.

If it had caught him he would have dropped like a dead one. The round finished with honors about even.

Eighth Round. Jerry decided he would do well if he could make the fight a draw. Unless by a chance blow the Tiger was too tough a man to beat. So he resumed his defensive tactics. Standing compactly, with his arms close to his body and a twinkling play of leg-work, he was once more Jerry Delane the boxer, elusive, brilliant, defying all his opponent's efforts to close with him. The audience were becoming impatient. "Put some pep into it!" shouted an American in the front row. To please him Jerry shot home another left. Once more it got the Tiger's nose, and the blood streamed down.

Ninth Round. The Tiger had evidently been having a heart-to-heart talk with his backers, and they had been reproaching him. As he rose again, his face was sullen and savage. "Make him *fight*," they had said. And he had answered: "All right, I'll make him fight, the blankety blank!" And now it was plain he meant to force the battle to a finish. He tried to pen Jerry in a corner, overwhelming him with a whirlwind of blows. Twice he had him, and there was a momentary mix-up. Then Jerry twisted away and once more was in the open, a mocking smile on his face. Yet somehow each time he managed to get home on the Tiger's unfortunate nose, and again to convert his face into a gory mask. The third time Jerry clinched, and with that vicious upward rasp of the open glove pushed the blood into the man's eye sockets. Again he was away, springy, mocking, elusive. The rage of the Tiger knew no bounds.

"Come on!" he roared. "Come on and fight like a man, and not like a bloody bally-dancer!" Then, shooting his face forward, and with his upper lip lifting like the snarl of a dog, he hissed: "Come on, *you dirty jailbird!*"

Jerry's hands dropped in amazement. That was the Tiger's chance. Rushing in, he jabbed to the stomach with the force of a pile-driver, and Jerry went down. He could not get his breath. The Umpire was counting him out. *One . . . two . . . three . . . four. . . .* The Tiger was crouching, with arm swung back to give the *coup-de-grace. Five . . . six . . . seven . . . eight. . . .* Then the voice paused. . . . *Time.* Once more he was saved.

Again in his chair he lay back, his mouth open, his eyes vacant. He was trembling, but this time not with weakness. Suddenly he sat up. "Gimme a drink o' that there dope," he demanded roughly of Joey. After he had taken it his mouth closed like the snap of a steel trap, his face twitched curiously, there was a mad gleam in his deep-set eyes. From between his grinding teeth came a string of curses. Chick looked at him with some alarm. Here was another man, harsh, brutal, primitive.

"What did he say to ye, Jerry, that got yer goat?"

"He called me . . . Ugh! I'll butcher him for it. I'll cut him to ribbons. You never saw me fight as ye'll see me fight now. I don't care what happens. Win or lose, it don't matter. I just want to kill that man."

An insane fury seemed to possess him. There and then he made as if to leap from his chair.

"Wait till time's up, anyway," said Chick. "And for God's sake try to control yerself! Ye've surely gone clean mad."

When the gong sounded, Jerry was up as if released by a spring, and the Tiger was barely out of his corner when the two came together. They seemed to meet almost with a crash. Jerry's head was down, his arms lashing. The Tiger was snapping in vicious short-arm jabs, but Jerry was insensible to feeling. Both men were bleeding freely now, and the thump and hammer of their blows resounded

to the roof. For two minutes they kept it up, ding-dong round the ring, Jerry driving the Tiger before him, and the crowd roaring on its feet. Then through his red rage Jerry saw clearly. His opponent was under-trained. Through a crimson mist glared the Tiger's face, and it was that of a man sore beset. With a great joy Jerry drew back, cool, wary again. He was deadly calm, but triumph blazed within him. He had this Tiger, had him beaten. He would play with him, torture him, take it out of him to the last gasp.

So, no longer attacking wildly, he in his turn gave way a little, but crashing in his left again and again with deadly effect. The Tiger was fighting blindly, desperately, his sole hope by a lucky blow to make a knock-out. Both eyes as well as nose were streaming blood now. Always he tried for that whizzing upper-cut to the chin and that vicious right-arm swing to the jaw. But, with an intuition that seemed marvelous, Jerry balked him by a jerk back or a duck of the head. The Tiger's furious welts were wasted on the air, and his strength was failing. His face was a hideous, tumefied mass, while the blood streamed down his chest. *Time.*

"Good for you," chirped Joey. "I always knew you was holdin' somethin' back. You've got 'im. He's never trained for this fight. Too much wine and fancy skirts. He thought he had an easy thing. Well, you can finish the poor devil this round."

Jerry did not want to finish so quickly. Revenge was sweet. He would savor it to the full. As he rose for the eleventh round, that same cold fury possessed him. With the washing off of the blood the Tiger looked more hideous than ever. His eyes were almost closed. His tufted hair hung in weird locks over his haggard face. His lips were split open, his flanks a mass of weals and bruises. That

shattering, body-to-body two minutes had made a wreck of him. He knew he was beaten, yet with dogged stamina he stood up to take his medicine. And perhaps at the bottom of his heart was hope, the hope of a lucky blow that would yet save him. But Jerry gave him no opening, no mercy.

"Come on now, Tiger," he sneered, "show your claws. Aw! you're the nice tame Tiger. You want to go back to the Bronx Zoo, you do."

"And you want to go back to Sing-Sing," snarled the Tiger.

"Oh, ye will have it," jeered Jerry. "I might have let ye down fairly easy, but now I'll crucify you. There . . . there. . . . How d'ye like that? That's only a sample of what's coming. Four rounds to go yet, Tiger, and every one a hell for you. There . . . and there. . . ."

Thus it went on. Jerry tapped the old wounds, so that they bled afresh. Choosing his spot, he struck with exquisite care to prolong the agony. And the Tiger knew it, and the watchers knew it. Already some of them were shouting, "Stop the fight." But the majority, excited by the blood lust, wanted the knock-out. The saddistic brute in the mob triumphed.

And now the Tiger, still snarling defiance, was reeling against the ropes, lashing out with blind, futile blows, the blood bubbling from his lips and nostrils. A pitiable sight, but in a way magnificent. The man was game to the core. Doggedly he kept on his feet, although there were no dirty tricks of the trade he did not try. Twice he was warned for butting, once for striking low. And so in a record of unworthy tactics the round ended.

And so the three that followed. Although exhausted to the last degree, the Tiger held on marvelously. His blows were no longer dangerous. They would scarcely have flicked the flies from a dead horse. He covered his head

completely as, crab-like, he retreated. When he rose, it was to roll into a clinch. There he held on tenaciously till the referee made him break. And still Jerry pursued him with vengeful fury. Once or twice he thought that the Tiger was shamming weakness, but he was too wise to get caught by that trick. Still, he had an uneasy feeling that his opponent was trying to bring off something, something desperate and sinister.

"Why don't ye put the poor bloke to sleep?" said Joey. "He's all in."

Jerry ground out a bitter laugh. "No, let the fight go to the last round. I'll finish him then, not before."

And now it was the last round. The Tiger had to be hoisted to his feet. He staggered forward like a drunken man. Jerry propped him up with his left, and, pivoting, swung back his right to deliver the knock-out blow. But it was not yet. The Tiger rolled into a clinch. He hung there weakly, yet there was something in his face that should have warned Jerry. The referee tried to separate them, but still the Tiger hung on. Jerry's left arm was between the Tiger's right and his ribs. Suddenly Jerry felt the man's whole weight thrown on it. He knew the trick, but before he could yield to the sudden stress he heard a snap.

Then the Tiger reeled back. His arms hung down. He was unguarded, but his face was distorted by a grimace such as one might picture in that of a fiend. For a moment he stood there grinning, for a moment only.

Jerry knew that his left arm was broken. He saw the white teeth gleaming in that blood-blotted face. He realized that the Tiger had scored after all.

So almost solemnly he flung back his right arm, and, deliberately taking aim, with all his weight behind it, he swung it crashing to the point of his opponent's jaw.

The fight was over.

CHAPTER VII

SETTLING UP

IN their room in the hotel, Jerry was awaiting his partner. After the fight Chick had unaccountably disappeared. Jerry could not help wondering what had become of him. However, Joey had helped him to dress and seen him home.

Now he was lying down and nursing his arm. The hotel doctor had done everything possible for it, but advised him to go straight to the American Hospital. He had not told Chick of his injury. Let the little man have his moment of joy and triumph. No doubt he was now busy collecting the winnings. He would feel terribly bad when he knew about the arm.

How Jerry wished Chick would hurry! He was suffering excruciating pain and wanted to get away to the hospital. However, he must see his partner first. In the end he was thinking of writing a note and leaving it, when Chick arrived.

What was the matter? Instead of being flushed with victory, Chick seemed downcast. His face was pale, and his eyes had that furtive look Jerry had noticed during the fight. His hands trembled as he drew out a bundle of notes and spread them on the table.

"There ye are, Jerry. I've been terrible busy. I got them to pay me. They want to make a return match."

"Nothing doing," said Jerry shortly. Chick evidently did not know about his injury.

"I told them we'd consider it; but I thought ye wouldn't. Well, maybe in a couple of weeks we'll make a match wid some of them Frinch guys."

Jerry laughed harshly as he endured a twinge of atrocious pain.

"What's your hurry?" he said. "The Treasury's fat. Besides, I want a rest, a long rest. How much have we got besides the purse? I heard they were offering five to one against me at the ringside. You got three thousand for the watch and your ring. That would make fifteen thousand. With the eight thousand for the fight, that will give us twenty-three thousand francs on hand."

Chick seemed to have lost his tongue.

"Well," went on Jerry, "we can live for six months on that."

Chick's voice came at last, but it was dry and faint.

"Jerry, I want to tell you sompin'. I've always been a good friend to you, ain't I, Jerry?"

"Sure, Chick. The very best."

"I've always acted the way I thought the best for you. But the slickest of us makes mistakes. Well, me lad, I've made a mistake, a bad one."

"What are you driving at?"

"It's about that three thousand. . . ."

"What! You mean you didn't bet it?"

"Sure and I did."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Well, ye see, Jerry, yer last form's been so rotten, and that Tiger was just carryin' everything before him, I thought ye'd have no more chance than a jack-rabbit. Thought ye'd lose sure, so I . . . I bet against ye."

"You bet *against* me!"

"Yep. Ye see, there was an Englishman at the American bar who'd seen ye fight in London and liked ye. He was a bit stewed, and braggin' he'd back ye at even money. So I got a frind o' mine to get a frind o' his to take him up for three thousand, and the boss of the bar held the stakes. Sure it's the dirty traitor I am!"

"Does anyone know?"

"Niver a soul."

Jerry laughed, discordant, mirthless laughter. Then he ceased suddenly.

"It doesn't matter. It's a crooked game, and I'm supposed to be a crook, anyway, ain't I?"

"Naw. You're too honest, Jerry. You're the squarest lad I ever met. That's the trouble. Ye always say just what ye think."

"Well, I'll say what I think now. I'm through with the game, everlastingly through. Chick, I 'owed you something—a good deal, in fact. That's why I felt I'd be going back on you if I quit the fighting business. But now we're even. I don't care about the money. It's that you weren't loyal . . . that's what hurts."

He took up the bank-notes and handed Chick four.

"Here's half of the winnings—your share. It'll take you back to America, Chick; and may the best of luck go with you."

"What are ye goin' to do, Jerry?"

"I don't know."

"I can't take this money."

Jerry threw it fiercely down on the table. "Ye've got to take it. And now, Chick, here's where our ways part."

"I . . . I can't belave it, me lad."

"I can't half believe it myself. But here goes. Good-by."

"Why, Jerry, what's wrong wid yer arm?"

"Nothing much. Good-by, Chick."

Like a man in a dream Chick held out a limp hand, and Jerry gave it a squeeze.

"Again, the best of luck to you, old pard."

"God bless ye, me boy!"

Jerry took his coat and hat, and with a firm step left the room.

Chick never saw him again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOME OF HIS ANCESTORS

JERRY gazed through the window of the happy-go-lucky little train. His arm was still in a sling, his face pale and very weary.

He was passing through a land of little fields, a green land rich with content. Every now and then they would draw up at a tiny station and linger awhile. There would be an unshaven, dusty *chef-de-gare*, a lumpy porter, a peasant girl or two wearing the *coif* of the village. At one of these stations a woman climbed into his compartment. He helped her with two baskets, one containing snowy eggs and golden butter, the other two clucking hens. Her eyes were a bright sea-blue, and her cheeks had a rosy freshness. She reminded him of a fine apple, round and sound and sweet.

He kept peering out to compare the names of the places with the printed one he held in his hand. Seeing his anxiety she asked to look at it.

"My poor monsieur," she said, "do not worry. I will tell you when we get there."

Satisfied he leaned back and closed his eyes. He was really very tired.

He got down at a small station that was exactly like a dozen others. When he showed the post-mark on an envelope, the ruddy-faced porter pointed to a smooth straight road. Sure enough he saw the name on a direction board, and decided to walk there.

It was early afternoon, hot and dusty. The little fields

were of all shapes and sizes, studded with apple trees and bordered with oak. Within their high banks many fields were wheat-brimmed. The wheat was in the milk, and the ears caressed each other with a silken lisp. Other fields were like emeralds, in whose jeweled richness girls in *sabots* guarded the crunching cows. The air was haunted by a scent of honeysuckle, and the sky happy with lark-song. A snug land, comforting to the heart.

Where the highway forked he hesitated; but an old stonebreaker silently pointed to his direction. A little further on, at a turn in the road, an age-corroded cross was etched against the sky. At its foot, silent as the stone itself, was a gray-haired woman. She wore the white cap of her country, and under it her face was clear-cut as a cameo. Her feet, in their coarse woolen stockings were thrust into warped *sabots*. Her hands, glazed and withered, lay in her lap. There she waited, a picture of patience, poverty, and neglect.

"Poor old beggar," he murmured pityingly. He put into her hollowed hand a franc piece, but it lay there unheeded. He thought she must be asleep till she raised her face, and then he saw that she was blind.

Soon he came to a wonderful wall. It was a wall for a millionaire, for it was covered with gold. Deep, honey-colored moss sheathed it, and bronzed or brightened in its juts and crannies. Then it yielded to a wall more dominating. This was richly robed in ivy, and at intervals there were loopholes where in times past armed men had kept guard. Peering through one of these, he saw a vast, neglected garden.

In a field of poppies to his right a girl was sitting at an easel. As he passed she gave him a quick, bright look. Troublingly he was aware that she had a fine, delicate air, a serene poise and pride. One of these English aristocrats,

he thought, with their crisp candor, their gallant distinction of manner. He passed her timidly enough.

And now, he came to what must in ancient times have been a very grand gateway. Indeed, the sculptured posts were massive and imposing still. Within was a great courtyard, a slimy pond in which ducks squatted, a manure heap, and beyond all a gray barn-like building. Yet for a barn it had a curious dignity. There was a gracious curve to the roof, a satisfying proportion to the boarded windows. Half worn into the gray granite of the arched doorway was the date—1692.

Here, then, was the ancient château, the home of his ancestors. Here they had lived mightily, lording it over the land. Though he knew little of history, the thought thrilled him. He might be a prize-fighter, a Yankee roughneck, but the best blood of old France flowed in his veins. At that moment something of its imperishable pride stirred and exalted him.

He peered through the doorway into the dark beyond. The flooring had been torn up and the great hall converted into a byre for cattle. He looked at the oak beams and saw that the upper chambers were turned into a hay-loft. Even as the old house had fallen, so it seemed he too had fallen. . . . Heavy of heart he turned away.

On the other side of the yard was a cottage from which came a wrangle of voices. There was the shrill crying of a child, the shrewish clamor of a woman, a man's raucous bellow. At his loud knock the racket ceased.

They came to the doorway and stared at him—the man bearded, brutal-looking, the face of the woman toil-worn, the child stupid with adenoids.

"Monsieur Charvet?" he demanded.

The man admitted it grudgingly, a look almost of fear came into the face of the woman, the child gaped vacantly.

He took out the last letter he had received, acknowledging money. It was so badly written that even the man he had got to translate it had done so with difficulty. However, it said that his mother was well, though unable to write in her own hand. She was having every care and comfort. They looked on her as they would their own mother, and hoped she would be with them for many a day to come. It was signed *Louise Charvet*.

At sight of the letter they started, a queer, frightened look in their faces.

"*Madame Delane . . . ici?*" he demanded.

They had grown sullen. The woman affected stupidity, the man shrugged.

"*Comprends pas, m'sieu.*"

Something strange here. Perhaps his mother was dead. They had been taking money pretending they had been caring for her. His face darkened. With a long, grim look he studied them, then turned on his heel. How helpless he felt! He could not speak two words to these people. Suddenly he thought of the girl in the field. If she were not English no doubt she could speak English. She might be disdainful; but he was desperate. He would beg her aid.

The poppies were growing so thickly around her they made one solid mass of color. Each was a lamp ardently aglow, yet as a whole they made a pool of scarlet flame. The exultant beauty of them was almost a pain. Now crushing down the dancing poppies he made his way to her.

She was putting the finishing touches to some trees when she was aware of his shadow. But she took no particular notice. She was used to people watching her paint, and indifferent to their presence. A farm worker, no doubt, in his Sunday suit. He noted the rich simplicity of her clothes, her air serene and distant. "A thoroughbred," he thought. "Well, anyway, here goes."

"Excuse me, miss, but you don't happen to be English?"

She turned with a look of thoughtful surprise. Steadily she regarded him. Her artist's eye appraised him. A fine tall chap; face rather interesting; Celtic type, blunt, strong, honest. But he looked tired, ill. And there was his arm in a sling.

"I'm only English by education," she said smilingly. "By birth I'm American."

He started. "I'm glad of that. I'm American too. I'm in a difficulty and can't speak the language. I thought maybe you might help me. I'm terrible sorry to trouble you . . ."

He broke off stammeringly. Never before had he spoken to a woman like that. She had dull-gold hair, loads of it. Her brow was broad and low, her eyebrows level, finely marked. Her dark gray eyes were frank and steady. She had a small, wilful mouth, a determined chin.

"Oh dear! It's a pity about me," she said laughingly. "What's the trouble?"

"I'm seeking a Madame Delane, but I can't make the people back there understand."

"Who is she?"

"She's supposed to be staying with them. She's in poor health."

"Ah, you must mean old Marie. I didn't know her by that name, but she's a great friend of mine. I do all I can for her. I'm afraid the family Charvet treat her abominably—send her down to the cross to beg. . . ."

His heart gave a lift. The vision of the old crone to whom he had given the coin was before him.

"Yes, it's a shame. I made a picture of her sitting at the foot of the cross. It was hung in the Salon. I'm greatly interested in her. I tried to get her into a home for old ladies, but the Charvets wouldn't hear of it. She was a kind

of relative, they said, and they felt it their duty to look after her. Swore they were devoted to her, couldn't bear to lose her. But I must say they show it in a funny way. A dirty drunken lot. . . . So you are interested in her too?"

"Yes," he said, then hesitated. Why should he bore this lady with his affairs? So he added: "A relation of hers in the States asked me to look her up if I passed this way."

"Well," she said indignantly, "whoever it was might have done something for her before now."

"But he did. He's been sending her money right along —thousands of dollars."

Her fine brows knitted to a frown.

"Ha! this wants looking into. I expect most of them found their way down Père Charvet's throat. There, I won't work any more to-day. Come and I'll show you old Marie, and you can judge how many of your friend's dollars have been spent on her."

She got her things together, and he helped her, carrying her easel and stool.

"You won't have to take them far," she answered him. "I've got a little car waiting by the road. Why are you looking so hard at my hat?" She had a frank directness that was sometimes disconcerting. He was indeed staring at the hat. It was of pandanus straw, circled by a wreath of tiny, pointed, purple-and-white shells.

"They come from the Marquesas," she told him. "They are tiny snails strung together by native girls."

"Have you been there?" he asked.

"No, it was sent me by a friend in Tahiti. I've got a lot of land close by, I believe. Cocoanut groves and so on. Some day I'm going to visit it."

A vision came to him. . . . Schooners rocking in the swell; reef foam; wharves crackling with heat; tang of copra; laughing brown faces, flower-wreathed; indolent-

limbed girls with eyes voluptuously velvet; flame-trees and hibiscus blossoms; palms, perfume. passion; men like gods, flower-crowned in the groves. How far and faint it was! . . . He roused himself, but they walked in silence to where a little English runabout was waiting. Into it they stowed her painting outfit.

"Now we'll go and see old Marie. We must be careful not to excite her. Any mention of America seems to do it. She must have suffered a great deal there. She's not quite right in her head, you know. She's very gentle, but any shock might be very harmful to her."

"But she's blind."

"Yes; only within the last year though. Perhaps it's just as well. She can't see all the dirt and misery around her. Ah, there she is."

She was at the foot of the cross just as he had left her, the piece of money in the hollow of her hand. He could not trust himself to speak. He was trembling, but he felt he must not show emotion before this girl—must not make her a party to his distress and pain.

The old woman turned as they approached. She surely had been very handsome at one time. Her profile, against the dark base of the cross, was pure as a carving in ivory. When she heard the voice of the girl, her face lit up with a wonderful joy, and she raised her trembling hands so that the piece of money rolled in the dust. The girl kissed her, and, sitting by her side, put one arm around her. The old woman took her hand, softly caressed it, then raised it to her lips.

"She thinks I'm the only friend she's got in the world," said the girl apologetically.

He turned away. He thought suddenly of the picture above his uncle's mantelpiece. She had been beautiful, and this was what life had made of her! A suffocating choke

was in his throat. A great bitterness surged in him. Grasping with his fit arm the branch of a tree, he shook with convulsive sobs. But when he looked again his face was set and hard.

"I guess I'm going now," he said.

"Where?"

"To 'beat up' this Charvet."

"But—you've only one arm."

"That doesn't matter."

At the sound of his voice the old woman had started. She was listening, with a startled look on her face. Suddenly she rose, groping blindly towards him. Then she stopped in a dazed way, so shaken by agitation that she fell against the base of the cross. He would have caught her, but furiously the girl waved him back.

"Fool! Fool! Can't you see you're exciting her?"

He moved away a little distance. He could see the girl soothing the old woman, caressing her as she would a child. He waited humbly, wistfully. It was so hard to realize. Tenderness and a profound pity swayed him. Would the girl never have done? Ah! there she was coming, but her face was stern.

"What does it all mean?"

"Don't you understand? She's my mother."

"Good God!"

She gave him a look of scorn. "Why did you let her get in this state?"

"I didn't know."

"Pity you couldn't find out. How long is it since you've seen her last?"

"I've never seen her to my recollection before now."

"I don't understand."

"It's a long story. No doubt I've been to blame, but—never mind. Heap on me all the ugly names you can think

of; it won't mend matters. Here's all I can do for the present, all the money I have in the world. Will you take it? Will you help her? If you will I'll bless you all my life."

He held out a little bundle of bills. Hesitatingly she took them.

"What do you want me to do with this money?"

"Spend it on her. Get her into the home you spoke of. Tell these people the game's up. They'll get no more out of me. They'll let her go then fast enough. There's over two thousand francs—not much, but I'll earn more as soon as my arm's better. She shall have everything of the best. I'll devote my life to her. I'll come and see her often and get her used to me gradually. It's the only way. I want to make her happy. Won't you help me? I'm a stranger . . . can't speak French. . . . It's hard for me. Again, for her sake, please help me."

"All right—for her sake. Don't go near her though. I had lots of trouble getting her calmed. Well, I'll spend this money on making her comfortable and I'll let you know. Whom shall I write to?"

"To Jerome Delane, care of the American Express Company, Paris."

"Delane! Seems to me I've heard that name. . . . Never mind. Don't worry. You can trust me to do my best."

"I don't know how to thank you."

"That's all right," she said shortly. She took a cigarette from a gold case, lit it, and looked at him thoughtfully. In her skirt of Irish frieze were pockets into which she plunged her hands. A sudden smile lit up her face, and for a moment she looked almost boyish. Then, waving him away with the cigarette in her hand, she almost mockingly uttered two words:

"*Beat it.*"

CHAPTER IX

THE GREEN SAFE

JERRY'S belt was in its last hole.

He pawned what clothes he could spare and lived on the proceeds. By that time his arm was strong enough to justify him looking for a job; but jobs were not hanging up to be unhooked whenever one wanted them. Times were hard. He was a stranger in a strange land, speaking a strange tongue. So he roamed the streets, haunted the machine shops, and got into debt. Decidedly it was not cheerful.

No doubt he would have done better in London, but the thought of his mother held him to France. He wanted to be on hand in case anything happened. He was afraid she was not doing very well.

A week after his return to Paris he had received the following letter:

"*SS. Paris,*
"HAVRE.

"DEAR SIR,

"According to your wishes, I have arranged to place your mother in the Old Ladies' Home at Senlis. There she will receive every care and comfort. It is run by the Sisters. I have told them about you, and when she is well enough to receive visitors you will be advised.

"I am sailing for the States, so I now leave her entirely in your care.

"Yours truly,
"FELICITY ARDEN."

Felicity Arden! That was her name, then. Somehow it seemed to fit her, to suggest her buoyant carriage, her frank, confident smile. She had the English manner, dignified yet assured. Her handshake would be firm and cool. A good golfer and tennis player, no doubt.

Curious how the thought of her seemed to brace him. The sight of someone resembling her set his heart thumping. Yet if it really had been she he would have dodged down a side street. He was keenly alive to the gulf between them. He was a boor, uncouth, uncultured; she a lady, dainty and refined. The prison, hobodom, the Ring, all had gone to coarsen him. Yes, he was a bit of a tough, and he bitterly knew it. He wanted to hold his own with the best. After all, had he not sprung from a line of nobles? Maybe it was their pride cropping up in him that made him so disgusted with himself.

But the girl's image gradually dimmed, and another took its place—Hunger. As he looked for work and failure followed failure, discouragement deepened to despair, resentment became rebellion. Years in prison had nourished in him a passion for liberty. Then succeeded the insolent freedom of the hobo and the prize-fighter. Now he wondered if ever again he could put his head under the yoke. The very idea seemed monstrous. To fetch and carry at the bidding of some other fellow! Bah! it was little better than slavery. No, he would not sell himself even for a day. He would starve, he would go naked, but, by God! he would be free.

The mind is never so exalted as when the body is starving. He had dreams of a world remade, where every man should be lord of his own strip of soil, grinding his own grain, spinning his own yarn. There should be no rich, and all should do their share for the common good. Civilization made slaves of men; only in simplicity was salvation.

Utopian dreams! He spent long hours working out schemes for the betterment of mankind. His thoughts were old and stale, yet to him they were fresh and new, and in his deepest despairs they thrilled and exalted him. He wanted to write, so he got a copy book and began an essay called "The Golden Age." He wrote it on a bench on the Tuileries, linking word unto word, munching dry bread and throwing the crumbs to the sparrows. But there came a day when he awoke to reality. A letter—a letter from the Home at Senlis, enclosing a bill for fifteen hundred francs.

His mother was not improving, it seemed. She was under the care of a specialist. Well, he must get that money somehow—beg, borrow, or steal it. Ay, even if he had to sandbag a man in the street he must get that money.

Walking up the Avenue de l'Opera he came to a pause in front of the office of the *New York Herald.* He was scanning the advertisements when a paragraph caught his eye.

Stillwell K. Austin, the well-known financier, has returned to Paris for the season, and will take up his residence in his hotel on the Boulevard St. Germain.

Stillwell Austin. Ha! there was the one he should knock down. Robbing a robber, that would be all. Well, if ever he ran into the man he would not be responsible for what he might do. He had seen pictures of Austin, slim, spruce, grimly handsome. He ordered men around like dogs, and somehow they obeyed him. He must be over seventy now, still virile and dominating. Everyone knew of his excesses, his mistresses, his orgies; but he was always master of himself, as of others.

The personality of Stillwell Austin had always fascinated Jerry. It seemed as if the old man was his evil genius, as if all his misfortunes were to be traced to the millionaire's door. And that afternoon he had an oppor-

tunity of gazing on the very door. As pursued by desperate thoughts he roamed up and down the Boulevard St. Germain, several times he passed the little private hotel owned by Austin. He stared up at the windows thinking he might catch a glimpse of that ruthless old face; but nothing—only drawn blinds, inscrutable, mysterious. Perhaps the owner was not at home. Once, indeed, he saw a Rolls-Royce standing in front of the entrance, and he drew near, hardly knowing what he would do. However, it was only a woman, furred in *taupe* and heavily veiled.

Yet Austin must be back, for when Jerry passed the next time a station van was unloading some heavy baggage. Two men were moving a small green safe by means of rollers. As they were having some trouble he instinctively stepped forward to aid them. Yes, the safe was Austin's. There were his initials painted across it. It must have been shipped from the States, for it bore the labels of the Cunard line. Stillwell Austin's private safe . . . then he started, staring at it with sudden surprise.

"Here, you move on. We don't want any help. Get to 'ell out of this."

Jerry swung round. Oh, that it might be Austin! But no, it was only a side-whiskered English butler. Jerry straightened himself, and at the sight of his face the man wilted.

"Who are you talking to?" said Jerry, throwing back a menacing fist. There was a professional ease in that swing. Side-whiskers recognized it, recognized, too, the upward turn of the bunched knuckles. He held out a flabby hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't know you was English. I thought you was one of them foreigners."

Jerry strode away. After all it was good sometimes to be a tough, a prize-fighter; good to think that there was no man you couldn't lick. It bought you respect, espe-

cially from lackeys like that. To them and their like pugilists were greater than peers, more to be respected than men of genius. A "pro" was a hero in their eyes. But as he walked on it was not of the butler he was thinking. It was of the little green safe.

Yes, it was an Orion safe. How it took him back to the old days when he was emergency man for the Company! How often had he hurried off to open one of this same model! It was the smallest they made, but a good little safe, laminated, reënforced, practically drill-proof. Even with thermite or the oxy-acetylene flame it would be a tough proposition. But he would have no need of that, not unless his hand had lost its cunning. He could pick out that combination in the time it would take another man to set it. As he twisted his fingers he could almost feel the delicate click of the tumblers. He . . .

What the devil was he thinking of, anyway? Breaking into Stillwell Austin's safe? He sat down on a bench. . . .

And why not? No doubt it contained, or would contain, bonds, jewelry, even currency. It would be so easy for him. He had already served a term for safe-breaking when he was innocent. Why not balance it up now by being guilty? Society had wronged him. Well, he would get even with society. And then it was Austin's safe—Austin, the man who had robbed and ruined his father, who had driven his mother mad, who was indirectly responsible for all his misery. Surely if there was a man to be cursed and detested, it was Austin. If he stole from Austin he was only getting his own back. True, he would have preferred to knock down the man in the street and rob him, but there were obvious objections to that. He must keep out of trouble for his mother's sake. But he must get that money . . . for her . . . he must. . . .

So sitting on the bench he fought with himself. In his

heart was black rage, bitterness, despair. Then rising once more he strolled leisurely along the sunny boulevard. As he passed the house with the drawn blinds he paused a moment. For the tenth time he scrutinized that dark façade. He knew it so well now, every toe and finger hold. For instance, he could enter by that second-story window. In two minutes he could reach it. Opening it would be a kid's job. Once inside, the green safe would not baffle him for long. . . .

It seemed like Fate, as if he *must* do it, as if the events of his whole life had been leading up to this very act. . . .

Society had made an outlaw of him. Everybody's hand was against him. Well, if the world chose to treat him like a beast of prey he would be a beast of prey. . . .

Yes, it seemed inevitable. He could borrow the tools he needed from a garage where he sometimes got a job washing cars. Hell! It would be dead easy. . . .

And on the washstand of his room he found a letter from his landlord telling him that if he did not pay up he would be turned out by the police. The threat decided him. That night he would turn burglar. He would break into the little green safe.

CHAPTER X

THE BURGLARY

FROM the shadow of the window curtains a rapier of light stabbed the blackness of the room. For a single second it circled round, darted at the door, vanished. . . . Darkness once more; silence. . . .

Then again the light shot out, but this time it was a slender silver wand, tapping in turn each object. There was something uncanny about that moving ray. It was like the antenna of a creature weird and terrible, touching cautiously the walls, the desk, the mantelpiece. In its white disc of revealment objects shot into being—a picture, a vase, a bronze Buddha. It stole from the dead ashes of the fire to a padded armchair, with on the table beside it an ash tray, on which lay the stump of a cigar. Finally it darted across the room and rested for a long moment on a little steel safe. Again it vanished. . . . Silence, darkness. . . .

From the curtain a man was stealing. Soundlessly he moved across the room, preceded by that probing light. Now he was crouching before the little green safe, and the white light like a diabolic eye was focussed on the disc of the combination. Now a hand came into the light-ray and began to turn the knob. Slowly he turned, listening intently. Once he stopped suspiciously. Tobacco! Cigar smoke! The air was full of it. His lips framed an inaudible whisper.

"Old swine! He's been here not so long ago. Gone to bed. Drunk most likely."

Again he swung his light about the room. It rested on the sideboard, where stood a decanter and a glass. With

renewed confidence he went on turning the combination. There was a soft click. He noted the number on the dial. Then he turned in the other direction. Soon he was rewarded by another faint sound. Once more he reversed and turned ever so delicately. Click.

"Shop numbers," muttered the man contemptuously.

He rose cautiously. Noiselessly he moved to the sideboard and poured himself a drink from the decanter. Then he tiptoed to the safe again. He turned the handle and swung it open. Eagerly he played his light, searching its recesses. A curse of disappointment.

Someone had recently been arranging things. There were bundles of documents bound with ribbon and stacked in orderly fashion. He took them up one by one.

"Bah! Contracts . . . share certificates . . . unnegotiable securities . . . no use to me. Ah, there's a compartment. Another combination. Wouldn't wonder if it worked on the same silly numbers.

Once more he twirled the combination, and soon the door of the tiny compartment opened to him. This time he gave a gasp of triumph.

"I thought so. A jewel case. Pearls. A necklace for one of his women. Keeps a regular harem, they say. Here's what I want—French bonds payable to bearer. Ha! better still, a packet of notes, *milles*. Must be a hundred thousand in that little wad. Couldn't be better if he had left them on purpose. Might have been expecting me. What's this? . . . a Will. . . ."

His white light played on a recently made document.

"I *hereby give and bequeath*"—("Written in his own hand, no doubt")—"*to my only daughter the sum of one dollar.*" ("Tough luck on the girl.") "*In recognition of a debt I can never repay*"—("The old man's conscience is troubling him")—"*I bequeath the sum of one million*

dollars to the son of"—("Who's the lucky devil?")—"*my first partner, Desmond Delane. . . .*"

The man gave a start, and the document fell from his hand. His eyes were fixed and staring. He did not stir.

From out of the darkness a hand had reached forth. It was resting on his shoulder. At the same moment he felt a cold rim of steel pressing against his right temple.

"Hands up!" growled a voice above him.

He threw up his arms. After a moment he turned his eyes, trying to pierce the darkness.

"Keep your hands up, or you're a candidate for the boneyard."

He felt the metal rim withdrawn, then like a miracle the darkness snapped into light. He was dazzled, bewildered.

"Rise and face about, keepin' your hands above your head."

Slowly he turned, staring blankly at what he saw.

It was an old man in evening dress, holding in his gnarled hand a vicious-looking Browning. But the hand did not falter, and the gray eyes were steady. A long, lean old man he was, with the wickedest face imaginable. Yet it was a strong face, handsome, clean-cut; a lined, shaven face, dark of skin and with crisp iron-gray hair curling on the finely-shaped head.

A deathlike silence. Tall and straight stood the old man, rolling in his loose lips a fresh cigar. An ironic light gleamed in his eyes. In a harsh, drawling voice he spoke.

"Thought ye'd got away with it, did ye? Old Stillwell Austin's not so easy, eh! Seventy and a day, but still in the ring. Good for a round or two yet. Why, boy, I saw ye climb up the window. I was layin' for ye there in the cupboard. If ye'd a-looked ye'd a-seen that cigar stump on the ash-tray wasn't yet cold. And now, what's yer name?"

The burglar closed his lips grimly. He was looking at the old man with steady eyes.

"Well, it don't matter. If you're the Noo York crook I think ye are, we'll soon find out. Don't ye move now. I'm an old feller, but I used to be a crack shot. I'd just as lief shoot ye as hand ye over to the police."

The burglar spoke. "Well, then, shoot, damn you. It wouldn't be the first defenseless man you've dropped."

"Hum! Ye've not got a gun on ye, have ye?"

"No, I'm unarmed."

"Hey! Well, that don't make any difference. If ye drop yer hands I'll sure shoot."

The burglar laughed sneeringly. "I'd just as soon be shot as handed over to the police. But before you pull, I'd like to tell you a thing or two. You're one of Creation's curses, a scourge of God."

"Say, you interest me. Go on."

"You've ruined thousands, broken hearts, burst up homes. In every stride to fortune you've trampled others. Widows curse you and the tears of children proclaim your greed. To keep up you and your like, millions toil in the muck. If all the harm you've done were counted up you'd be a hundred times more criminal than I. I tell you, Stillwell Austin, with all your millions I'd rather stand in my shoes than yours to-day. Go on now . . . shoot. It'll be a fit end to your evil life. Your days are already numbered. We'll meet down in hell, and there we'll have our reckoning. Fire, damn you!"

The old man bit savagely on his cigar.

"Well, say, you're some spieler. If I could talk like you I'd get up in the Senate more often. But ye're tryin' to get my goat. You've got some game on. Hold on there, or by God! I'll drop ye!"

For the burglar had calmly taken a pace towards the leveled pistol.

"Shoot then, you skunk, shoot!"

The old man's forefinger quivered on the pull, but he did not fire. Instead, he backed off a bit. They now stood on either side of the oak table, the burglar with his hands always raised, the millionaire covering him.

"You're appealin' to my sportin' instincts," said Austin at last. "It won't do. I don't want to kill you, but . . ."

His hand went groping backward to the wall. The quick eye of the burglar saw a bell-button there. The old man would summon the servants. He must act swiftly. With his right foot he was stealthily reaching under the table. It touched a brace low between two legs. Crooking his foot in it he pulled up with all his strength. The table turned completely on its end, forming a barrier between them. At the same moment Austin fired.

With a cry of rage and pain the burglar heaved himself forward. He had the old man now, had him pinned between the table and the wall. The stout oak was like a shield, and he was crushing his prisoner. But Austin was pushing back, resisting fiercely. It was a contest of strength. That would not do. He must overwhelm his opponent. . . .

So the burglar stooped down and grasped the legs of the table nearest the floor. He lifted up and backed off. He was going to get a little "way" on, so that he could hurl himself forward. He would use the table as a kind of battering ram to crush his adversary against the wall. But in that moment of withdrawal the old man had wriggled out, was free. Quick as thought the burglar wrenched round to the light-switch, and the room was plunged in blackness.

They were fighting in the dark now, and Stillwell Austin had the advantage. Twice he fired, directed by his oppo-

nent's breathing. Once he winged his man. The burglar felt a thud at his shoulder, and what seemed a stream of warm milk ran down his arm. He knew he was weakening, knew he could not continue for long to evade this terrible old man. Relentlessly he was being cornered, to be shot like a mad dog. He was planning a rush with all its risk when suddenly his hand, reaching back, came in contact with the bronze Buddha. Directed by the last shot, and swift as a baseball player throwing to save a home run, he whizzed the metal god through the darkness. There was a dull thud, a groan, a falling body . . . then silence again.

With every nerve tingling he listened. Not a sound. Strange that the servants had not been aroused. But then they were probably sleeping on the other side of the court. No, he could hear nothing. The house was deathly still. Then he turned his attention to that other silence, the silence of the room. There was something sinister about that silence, something inexorable. An appalling thought came to him. A great fear thrilled him. Heedless of further danger he stumbled over to the figure on the floor. No motion . . . no sound. Frantically he felt at the heart . . . no beat. With a swift stride he recovered his electric torch. Then shuddering and with a violent effort he turned it on that still face. He saw wide, staring eyes framed in the blood that oozed from the crushed temple. He could not look again. It was too horrible. He extinguished his torch and stood there shivering.

This would not do. He must recover himself, get away. The man was dead; he had killed him, but . . . The fear of the prison seized him. He knew it too well. This would be a lifer—if not the scaffold. And his death would serve nothing. It was only Society's revenge on him, the Society with which he was at war. No, he would cheat the guillotine—escape. He did not want the jewels, the money, now.

All he wanted was safety, to get away from this accursed room.

But once more he listened anxiously for the beating of the old man's heart. No hope. Still he did not like to leave him thus, sprawling grotesquely on the floor. He would lift him on to that armchair. If any one entered they might think he was sleeping.

So catching the body under the arms he dragged it over the carpet. But just as he was opposite the window he stopped. . . . What was that sound that made him draw back? *Someone was opening the window . . . entering the room.* Always holding the dead man under the arms he retreated still further. Now from the dark shadow of the curtain he saw a darker shadow detach itself. What could it mean? The shadow had halted. Something mysterious there was about it. It struck a terror to his heart. Would it never move? The tension was telling on his already tortured nerves. Perhaps it was an evil spirit, the accusing shade of the man he had killed. He wanted to shriek aloud. Then panic gripped him and raising the body of the dead man high overhead he sent it crashing at the shadowy figure.

Now he was out of the window, hanging to the balcony, dropping to the pavement. He was running like a madman. Two policemen at the further end of the street saw him drop, and gave chase. He was weak, wounded, but it was not the fear of the pursuing *agents* that winged his feet, it was the thought of that Shape in the room.

So running like a deer he distanced his pursuers and disappeared into the sinister darkness of the little crooked streets.

. . . . . .

But what of the Shadow? It was a very substantial shade after all—a man. He had parted the dark curtains.

All in the room was still and black. Where was his electric torch? Damn it! Where had he put it? . . .

Then while he was fumbling someone seemed to leap at him out of the dark. He was bowled completely over. There was a great weight on top of him. Mad with fear he struck. He felt his fist crash against a skull. He clutched his assailant, threw him off, knelt on him.

But the form under him did not stir. Where was that light? Quick! The hand with which he had struck seemed to be covered with some hot, wet liquid. Now he had opened the torch. . . . *Good God!* . . .

Hark! The house was aroused. He heard the shriek of the concierge, running feet, opening of doors. They were coming to capture him. He darted to the window. No escape there. A policeman stood directly under it, automatic in hand. They were rushing along the corridor. They were bursting into the room.

Then he leapt. Crash! He alighted on the waiting *agent*, who collapsed under him. Like a flash he scrambled to his feet and was away. They were firing from the balcony, but he was unhurt. Blindly he dashed to where the Seine placidly rippled, and the quays were discreet with darkness. He was going to plunge into that darkness, but thought better of it. For he was covered with blood. Blood! Before all things he wanted to wash away those dreadful stains. So he slipped into the rippling river and let it bear him through the night.

. . . . . .

The following morning when his landlord came to Jerry Delane to collect the arrears of rent, and also to tell him that a great American millionaire had been murdered in his library, he found the bed had not been slept in. And from that moment his lodger seemed to vanish as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

BOOK II.—THE BEACHCOMBER

CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE

FIVE men were playing poker in the palm grove behind the shipyard. Near them, over a fire of cocoanut husks, half-a-dozen chickens were stewing in a large pot, and against the ragged gray butt of a palm reposed a rum demijohn. All five were in a more or less blissful state of befuddlement.

Bad Marc Macara was dealing,—a goliath of a fellow, bearded like a Corsican bandit. Indeed, his shirt, open to the waist, showed a chest wadded with a *maquis* of hair. Hair covered his massive arms and his heavy hands down almost to the finger tips. Hair filled his ears and sprouted from his nose. I have said Goliath, but perhaps I should have said gorilla; except that he was six feet two in height, wheras gorillas, I believe, seldom exceed five feet.

Opposite him was his satellite, the little man called Smeet. He was almost bald, but had very bushy eyebrows overhanging very pale blue eyes. His lantern jaws were clean shaven. He wore a sleeveless singlet that showed arms covered with obscene tattooing. He was about five feet two and walked with a waddle. He pretended to have been a jockey, but more likely had only been a stable-boy.

Next him was Gunsburg, known as the Dutchman. He claimed to be Swiss, but probably was German. He was neither shaven nor bearded, a week's growth of stubble bristling all over his coarse, fat-padded face. A gross man,

a huge eater, with puffed-out, slimy lips, and cropped, greasy hair. His stomach ballooned over his blue-denim pants, the top button of which it had burst away. Indeed it was only the pressure of that rubber-like abdomen that kept them in place. His small gray eyes were shrewd and sharp, and at times there was a hint of military precision in his bearing.

The fourth man was known as Dirty Hank. He lived in a shack by the shipyard, and was said to be an eater of land-crabs. In any case, he was probably the most unwashed white man in the South Seas. His scant, ash-colored hair seemed to sprout from a crust of dirt. From a yellow, wizened face, craned on a scraggy neck, he peered with blinking, dust-rimmed eyes through brass-rimmed spectacles. His long, angular form was stooped when he walked, and his semmit and duck trousers were sour and sweat-rotted. The sort of human being you might expect to pick from an ashpit.

The fifth of the party was a degenerate called Bill Belcher, and known as Windy Bill. His obsession was not Woman, but "women," and he always switched the subject round to his Casanova-like career, counting his amours and adventures by the hundred. Beneath his tan his face had a sickly tone, and his eyes an uneasy look. His thin legs, bare to the knees, were covered with ugly scars.

Such the human refuse, squatted round, flapping the greasy cards on a palm leaf and swearing exotic oaths. And now, tired of playing for matches, they broke up. Only Gunsburg kept his place, starting a game of solitaire. Dirty Hank reached for an accordion and began to play a hula-hula melody. Windy Bill loaded a Winchester twenty-two to pot land-crabs. Smeet tended the fire under the boiling chickens; while Bad Marc Macara fell asleep with discordant snores.

"Say, ain't this the great country," said Smeet, sniffing dreamily at the odor from the pot. "I had to stow away to get here, but now I've made it a shotgun couldn't scare me back."

"The Hobo's Paradise," commented Windy, taking a shot at a big crab that stood at the entrance of a hole. There was the faint snip of the bullet, but the crab did not budge.

"No good, Windy. You'll never kill 'em wiv them short shells. You want longs. The bullet skids off 'em. Anyway, you want to hit 'em bang in the eye. . . . There! you nearly got that one. Tickled him up anyway. Yes, as you say it's the place all good bums go to when they die. You couldn't budge me wiv a charge of dynamite."

"The French Government would like to get us out," said Windy. "But they would have to pay our passage, and they haven't got a *sou*. As it is, they've got the country bled white. Every cent it produces goes to support fat *functionnaires*. Got a great graft, they have."

"Right you are, Windy. Got a head on you, you 'ave. There ain't no place like it in the 'ole bloody universe. Wild 'osses couldn't pull me off this spot. But I'm sorry we ain't got suckin' pig instead of them there rubber 'pools.' Say, Windy, you're the bartender. 'It us wiv anudder slab o' booze."

"There ain't none left. Demijohn's dry."

"Wot about the Chinaman?"

"Won't let us have another drop on tick. No money. The *vahines* only make money when the boat's in."

"No more booze, and this Marc's weddin' night. When 'e wakes up and finds out won't 'e be peevish! 'E'll bust in that Chink's map."

They both looked rather fearfully at the snoring giant. Smeet swayed over the steaming pot, staring with bleared

eyes through the shadowy palm grove to the shining beauty beyond.

"No, it ain't reel," he said appreciatively. "It's one of them pipe-dreams. Say, Windy, a regiment couldn't get me outa here."

"You've already expressed that sentiment," said Windy crossly. "*Ad nauseum*, I should say. You're drunk, Smeet."

"No more nor you, else you'd 'it them crabs. 'Ere, let me show you."

They struggled for the rifle, and while they were wrangling a man came sauntering through the grove towards them. Smeet saw him first.

"Look at 'im," he sneered. "The cove wot deserted from the *Jessie Bell*."

"You mean the *Jezebel*. Don't blame him. He was a wise guy."

"Wot's the matter wiv the bloke, any'ow? 'E's on the beach same as us. 'E's no better than us, and 'e won't speak to none of us. Seems to 'old 'imself above us."

"We'll see if he won't speak to us. You wait."

They both watched the approaching figure. He was a tall man clad in white duck, coarse but clean. He had been swimming in the dock, and his hair was still damp. His naturally pale face had taken on a clear sunburn. His deep-set eyes had an expression grave and stern. His short, strong beard was trimmed round his mouth, which was firm to the point of being grim. His figure was very fine—long and lean, with a suggestion of being swift yet very strong. He was reading a book, and as he passed the group he put it in his pocket.

"Hullo, Bo!" hailed Windy. "Come over and join the happy family."

The man halted, hesitated, then walked towards them.

"Hullo, boys!" he said.

"That's right. Be sociable. Pleased to make your acquaintance. Allow me to introduce you to the only real and original association of Polynesian Panhandlers. This here shrimp with the thatch to his lamps is Mister Smeet. York by birth, Yank by adoption, Yegg by force of circumstances. This here gent maltreating a so-called musical instrument is Horrible Hank. He's so dirty, if you rubbed him on paper he'd write. That greasy individual cheating himself at a card game is Herr Otto Gunsburg, Alsatian, Swiss, or Dutch—anything you like but Prussian. That huge person so peacefully polluting the atmosphere with his head on a palm-butt is Bad Marc Macara, of Sing Sing, San Quentin, and other well-known resorts. Once the Scourge of Seattle, he is now the Terror of Tahiti. And lastly there's my humble self, the Beau Brummell of the Beach, William Belcher, University graduate, and . . ."

"And commonly known as Bawdy Bill," cut in Smeet.

"I thank you, Master Smeet; but it is very unkind of you to refer in such a rude way to my reputation as an *homme galant*. And now, having told you our several names would it be indiscreet if we asked your own?"

"Yes, what the hell d'ye call yerself?" broke in Smeet.

"Jack will do as well as anything."

"Don't overwhelm us with confidences," sneered Windy. "We respect reticence. We're all reticent more or less."

"Why don't you offer the man a drink?" squeaked Dirty Hank, ceasing for a moment to persecute the accordion.

"Right you are, Stranger. I'll mix you a rum punch. Hullo! there's King Marc raising his royal head at the mention of rum."

Windy tilted the demijohn up, grimaced, made as if to

squeeze it. A roar came from the aroused giant by the bulbous palm-butt.

"Here! . . . don't tell me it's dry."

"Nary a drop."

"And this my weddin' night . . . "

Bad Marc started to fire off a volley of curses, each one stronger than the last, and in the midst of them he saw the Stranger. He looked at him loweringly.

"Who's the guy?"

"This is Jack," said Windy sweetly.

Bad Marc snorted. The Stranger, sitting on another palm-butt, had filled a corncob pipe in a leisurely way. Now he was lighting it, and he nodded carelessly over the flame. Bad Marc raised himself up.

"Say, Stranger, you know on enterin' this favored circle it's the custom to pay your footing."

"That's right," squeaked Dirty Hank. Smeet nodded vigorously; Windy grinned; while the Dutchman looked up with sudden interest.

"Pay your footing," came the chorus.

The Stranger put his hand in his pocket. Alas! he found nothing.

"Sorry, Boys; I got no money."

"Fergot ter draw it outa ther Benk," sneered Dirty Hank.

"If I wasn't speakin' as one genleman to anudder," said Bad Marc, "I'd allow ye was a liar. All I can say is, if ye don't happen to discover ye've made a mistake the consequences might be disagreeable to yerself."

"I tell you I'm broke."

"Ain't there no way ye could think of to raise some coin? Wot about yer woman? Won't she come through?"

"I haven't got a woman."

"Wot! You hain't got a gel! Say now, that's an idea.

I'm gettin' a new one this night, and you can have me old one. I've bashed 'er about a bit. But there—when the doctors get through patchin' her up I guess she'll pass in a crowd."

"I don't want your cast-off women," said the Stranger in a tone that made Bad Marc sit up. "I don't want any women. And it's true I've got no money. If I had I'd come through. I can't pay for footing, but I tell you what I'll do." (Here he looked round thoughtfully.) "I'll fight for my footing. I'll fight any one of you, or each in turn, commencing with the big fellow."

Bad Marc stared. Could he believe his ears? Was he being defied in his own citadel, he the Boss of the Beach, taking unchallenged tribute of them all? It was incredible. He rose slowly to his height, huge and hirsute, and with his great fists clenched, his head lowered like a bull, his eyes glowering with fury, he advanced to chastise the insolent Stranger. But at this precise moment there was a distracting interruption.

Through the palm grove from the native quarter, three women had been approaching, and now they burst on the scene.

"Behold, they come," said Windy. "The Bacchantes of the Beach."

Snatching up the accordion Dirty Hank began to wheeze out *Here Comes the Bride.*

The first of the women was Gunsburg's girl. She was a well-known hula-hula dancer called Gaby, well formed and passably good looking. The second was a huge Amazonian creature, a mountain of fat, known as Papeno Pol. She pertained to Smeet. Both wore loose dresses of muslin, snow-white, and beautifully laundered. Their feet were bare and their hair hung foamily about their

shoulders. Wreaths of flowers were around their necks, and flowers starred the dusk of their tresses.

The third of the party was a young girl about sixteen. She had on a robe of soft white muslin, and around her head was a wreath of snowy blossoms. Her pale face contrasted with the dusky complexions of the others. Although so young, she was fully developed, and had a wild, exotic beauty.

Between them they were pushing her forward, and she was trembling, hanging back, obviously much afraid.

"Come on, Zelie. Here he is. Here she is, Marc."

Bad Marc turned to the Stranger, who still sat smoking imperturbably. "Here, you geta hell out this. I'll attend to your case later on." But the Stranger did not move. He seemed interested. Bad Marc sat down again and held out his arms.

"Come on, me darlin'. Come to me lovin' arms."

They looked about as uninviting as those of a grizzly, so it was little wonder the girl held back, whimpered, turned away her head. She was more like a lamb being led to the slaughter than a joyous bride. But she was being pressed forward by powerful arms.

"Come, me little sweet'eart. Give yer hubby, wot's to be, a smackin' kiss."

"She doesn't seem particularly keen, does she?" observed the Stranger.

Bad Marc started, turned towards him with a black scowl.

"What! You here yet! I told you to fade away. Get a move on or I'll crucify you."

Then he pushed his dark face into the girl's fair one.

"Come now, me Honey, ye love me, don't ye? Oh, ye little Beauty!"

"Beauty and the Beast," said the Stranger.

This time Bad Marc rose. He put the girl down rather roughly, and advanced to the Stranger again.

"I'm as good a lookin' man as you are," he said. "An' if I'm not ye'll be no mammy's darlin' yerself when I git troo wid ye."

His intention was obvious, but the Stranger made no effort to rise. Calmly he smoked on. This indifference seemed to take Bad Marc aback. He stood over the Stranger, his fists raised.

"Bah!" he said disgustedly. "You banana-faced bar-stud! wiv one blow of me fist I could smash you like a rotten mango. But you're not worth it, you . . ."

At a loss for further expression adequate to his scorn Bad Marc stooped down. He threw up the leg of the Stranger's white-duck trousers, and spat full on the exposed calf.

The next moment it seemed as if a thunderbolt had struck him. He went whizzing across the open space, shot over the fire, upsetting the pot, and landed on his back on the other side.

All was confusion. Gunsburg and the two women were gathering up the chickens. Barney and Hank were gathering up Bad Marc. Smeet was shouting, "A ring! A ring!" Only the Stranger was unmoved.

"By all means," said he, "form a ring."

"What is it to be?" demanded Smeet. "Queensberry rules or rough-and-tumble?"

"As you like," said the Stranger.

They turned to Bad Marc, who strained in their arms, panting and glaring.

"Go-as-you-please," he roared; "and God help the loser."

Then tearing off his shirt the fight began.

CHAPTER II

THE ENCOUNTER

TALL, straight, calm stood the Stranger.

A light almost joyful was in his eyes. He did not even trouble to put up his guard. It was plain to him that, however Bad Marc might excel at rough-and-tumble fighting, he knew nothing of the pugilistic science.

With a howl like a furious beast Macara broke from his supporters, and swung two devastating blows at his opponent's head. But somehow the head was no longer there, and he only punched two holes in the innocent ozone. Again he turned and charged, swung, missed. The third time he made as if to do the same, but, stopping suddenly, launched a furious kick at the other's stomach. His foot caught the Stranger right in the wind, and down he went.

"Go on and finish him," cackled Dirty Hank. "Kick the lights out of him. Get him in the gizzard."

Bad Marc would have done so, but Smeet held him back.

"No," he said, "be a sport, Marc. Let the bloke get 'is wind."

The Stranger was ghastly pale. The sweat of agony glistened on his brow. He groaned, rolled about. Slowly, very slowly, his breath came back. Eagerly they waited for him to get up. But he took his time and perhaps he was foxing, for when he did rise it was with a sudden spring. He was on his feet again, eager, alert, apparently none the worse.

Once more Bad Marc rushed and swung, but this time the Stranger struck. He did not seem to hit very hard.

The blow merely flashed in, yet a moment after the right eye of Bad Marc rose in a tumefied mass.

He came more cautiously next time, and once more he stopped suddenly and launched that vicious kick. But his opponent caught the foot at its full swing, caught it with his hand, and Bad Marc nearly turned a somersault. He crashed on the top of his head and rose half stunned.

"You're about as quick as a rhinoceros," said the Stranger. "And you're muscle-bound. Whoever told you you could fight?"

Marc replied by rushing at him with whirling arms. The Stranger jarred him sharply under the chin, side-stepped, swung to his other eye. It, too, rose almost immediately.

"Why don't you stand up to me?" said Macara, pawing the air madly. "Come on and fight like a man, not a bloody tango-teacher."

"All right." The Stranger stepped in, raining such a swift fury of blows that Marc fell back with a groan. The Stranger also fell back, rubbing his hand ruefully.

"You big brute!" he said. "You've skinned my knuckles with your beastly fangs."

It seemed, however, as if these same knuckles had done some pretty work on the face of Bad Marc. His lip was split open, his nose smashed, his cheeks bruised and pulped.

But he was not beaten. Disregarding that hail of blows he rushed in and flung his great arms round the Stranger. Now he had him. In that great bear's hug he could crush the life out of him. But somehow the Stranger had his arms free, and was hammering in deadly blows to his ribs, each one of which seemed to jar the breath out of him. That would not do. He fell back, and as he did so he launched another deadly kick.

This time the Stranger did not escape. The foot missed his stomach, but it ran up his shin, stripping the skin off.

The Stranger bent down, rubbing his leg and wincing with pain. Then he looked up to where his opponent still stood, groggy, blood-boltered, blindly pawing the air.

"All right," he said. "That's enough from you."

His eyes narrowed, and the glint in them was cold and cruel.

"Now, my man," he drawled, "I'm going to deliver a favorite blow of mine. It's known as a 'swing to the point.' It will jar your spinal column and paralyze your brain for a time. It's the popular blow for a 'knock-out.' Watch how I do it. Here goes."

Then he feinted once or twice, poised a moment, and delivered the blow magnificently with his right. The crack of it was sickening. Macara dropped like a dead man and lay still.

"There!" said the Stranger, "my little exhibition is over. That is, unless any of you other boys like to have a turn. I ought to warn you, though, that I'm a 'pro.' . . . Nothing doing? . . . Well, let me tell you one thing. In future I'm boss of this beach. I'll make you respect me. I'll make you eat dirt. You're nothing but a bunch of lousy scum, and I'll put the fear of God in you before I'm through."

They were staring at him, sullen, scowling.

"Stand back there!" he snapped suddenly.

For Gunsburg had lifted the bar of iron that was used to poke the fire, and was stealing up behind him. The man's arm was raised to bring it crashing down on his skull. But Gunsburg stopped. He was staring at the black muzzle of an automatic.

"Don't try tricks," sneered the Stranger. "I always pack a gun, and I can shoot straight. See . . . that crab . . ."

He fired. The crab turned over and lay with its pink legs feebly waggling.

"Remember," he gritted out, "I'd as lief shoot one of you as I would that crab. Steady there, you dogs!"

They were not cowards, these men. All four were desperate outlaws. A gun had no terror for them. Yet now they faltered, looked at each other furtively. Should they rush him? He might get one, maybe two; but the others would triumph.

So there they paused—Gunsburg had his poker poised, Windy was fingering the little Winchester, Smeet had drawn a long knife, Hank was lifting a heavy lump of coral. The women clung in a frightened group, and the moment was tense with danger.

Then suddenly a strange bellowing rent the silence, and all four turned. They dropped their weapons.

"The steamer!" cried the women. "The steamer has got in." The men no longer thought of their feud. It was the great event of the month, the arrival of the San Francisco steamer. It meant money, booze, debauch. With one accord they followed the already running women.

But the Stranger did not share their excitement. Casting a contemptuous look at the prostrate Macara he went his way.

CHAPTER III

THE BUNGALOW

1.

THEY were leaning over the side of the *Raratonga* watching the flying fishes, when Coombs suddenly proposed. Felicity had seen it coming for some time, rather dreaded it. She liked Coombs immensely, and didn't want to hurt him. She liked him because he was really a handsome man, and because, in spite of the fifteen years of difference between the brothers, he at times reminded her irresistibly of Clive. Besides, he was her Trustee, and she respected his keen business mind.

So they were watching the silvery shoals that skimmed along in the sunshine when Coombs seized the occasion. They were both quite calm. In fact, he put it as a business man might put a proposition.

Felicity explained that her affection for him was of a strictly sororal kind; that after Clive's death she could never really love any man again. He said he quite understood that. He knew he could never aspire to his brother's place in her heart, but at the same time she could not go on as she was doing. She must have someone to take care of her.

Felicity demurred at this. She felt quite capable of taking care of herself. Had she not done so for at least three years—in her little studio in the Latin Quarter, in her villa at Beaulieu, in Rome, Geneva, a dozen other

places? No, Coombs had nothing to convince her there. *Au contraire,* she prized her freedom.

So he took another line. He stressed the social advantages of a union between them. They were both rich; both of the best stock Boston could boast. Surely they owed something to their families, to Society. Gravely he talked of a house on Fifth Avenue, a cottage on Long Island, the Yacht Club, the Riviera Rush . . . so on. And all the time her eyes were salt, but not with sea-spray, and she was seeing a little lonely cross over the hill from Cambrai.

"Well," she said at last, "you must give me time to think it over."

"How long, Felicity?"

"Give me three months, the three months I'll be on the Island. Till you come back to fetch me. You'll have your answer then."

Coombs did not approve of her remaining alone in Tahiti. But then it was French, and he strongly disapproved of anything French.

"The French," he said, "are an immoral race, and until they change their national character there can be no friendship between France and the United States. Just look at the pornographic literature displayed in the windows of their book stores."

"For foreign consumption," answered Felicity.

"And their theaters," he went on. "Their Palais Royal farces, their light way of regarding conjugal infidelities."

"They look at life," said Felicity, "from another angle. They make comedy where we make tragedy. Which is best? They are witty and wise with the wisdom of an ancient race. They have learned how to live, to take the world as they find it, and get the most out of it. We look down at the French superiorly, but they are laughing at us."

"You're an expatriate," said Coombs angrily, with that dogged Puritan light in his pale blue eyes.

"No, I love my country. I would willingly die for it, even as my husband died for it. But I try to see the good in all peoples, and to understand their point of view. The French are above all practical. They face facts, acknowledge unpleasant truths. And as for morality, they think that it is we who are immoral. The French mother guards her daughter like a duenna till the day of her marriage. Even if the young girl wanted to do wrong she would have no chance. They look with horror at the freedom our girls are allowed. They call them *demi-vierges*. And after all, is there not something in it? The French husband gets a girl who is technically pure. Not that it matters so terribly."

(Coombs fumed when she talked in this frank way. He considered passion indecent. But she loved to shock him.)

However, to return to the proposal, Coombs was satisfied. He raised her hand to his frosty little mustache. A kiss both courtly and correct followed.

Felicity was relieved. She had got it over for a time. Coombs was going to Sydney to put their new car, the "Arden Eight," on the market. When he returned she would see.

2.

. . *Tahiti!* Would she ever forget the thrill, the joy she felt as they drew near? Her first sight of the tropics! Gray loomed the isle. It lightened to green: valleys deepened, and groves grew radiant. They nosed in through the coral gateway, and the anchor shattered the placidity of the lagoon. In the crystalline blue she watched a following shark, a zinc-gray shadow moving with marvelous grace.

"Why do you want to stay here?" asked Coombs, crossly mopping his brow. "It's as hot as Hades, and, I should think, as full of damned souls."

"For two reasons. I want to paint, to get the feeling of the place, to out-Gauguin Gauguin. Then I want to visit my estate. Remember I am a land-owner. Over on that island they call Moorea I have miles and miles of cocoanut groves, an army of cocoanut palms all making money for me."

"Huh! So far they've only cost money. Something wrong there. I'll look into it on my return. That was Clive's buy."

"Yes, he wanted to build a bungalow and come down here every winter. You know his romantic ideas, that same quixotic impulse that made him volunteer in the first year of the war."

"Leaving you after only one month of marriage."

"He had a sense of high adventure."

"Which cost him dear."

"Which gained him deathless glory. . . . But there! That's Papeete."

"Where?" asked Coombs.

And truly they could see only a few beach bungalows and sunbaked warehouses. Was this all, she wondered?

But she was soon to know better. The town was so richly drowned in verdure one could get no idea of it from the sea. Everywhere nature triumphed. A big, scattered village embosomed in flowers and canopied by sun-splashed palms—that was Papeete.

3.

Coombs had gone. There are people one likes enormously, but is glad to get away from them for awhile. She

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wondered how she would enjoy Coombs as a permanent partner. Well, she was not going to worry about that just yet.

Indeed, worry seemed to have no place on this enchanted isle. All day she sauntered about the town. But sauntering is perhaps too violent a word to express the languid way in which she drifted along. So far she did not find the heat oppressive. She simmered in a gentle perspiration like those earthen jars which keep water cool.

In that furnace glare, however, even the smallest shade was welcome. She strolled along white roads starred with mangoes. In their fall they had burst open, revealing the lusciousness of their flesh, golden as the bosoms of the girls who gazed at her with such bold, inquiring eyes.

Bordering the road was verdure of sappy luxuriousness. The overspreading mangoes showered down their orbs of honeyed sweetness; the banana plants waved translucent banners. The cocoanut palms shot slim gray stems that ended in frivolous fronds swishing round a noduled core. Breadfruit trees flaunted starry leaves and dangled pimply globes of fruit. The bougainvillæa vines wove their purple tapestries over the tiny houses; the flamboyants flung their scarlet against the sky, and showered down petals till all the air seemed lit with fairy flames. Yellow, crimson, mauve gleamed the hibiscus blossoms, while the tiare, white and pure, loaded the air with perfume.

What a dream it was! How could she ever paint in the bewilderment of so much beauty?

4.

She had taken a tiny bungalow with a trellised balcony. It was hidden from the busy world, but open to the airs that blew. She wore a peignoir of tussore silk, and every

once in a while she doffed it and entered the cabinet that formed the bathroom. Then slipping out of her chemise she stepped into the big zinc-lined box that was the bath. She turned on the shower. The water was soft, heavy, sweet. It was cool yet not cold. It pelted her deliciously, driving the fever from her veins. Elate and radiant, a moment later she was back on her couch on the balcony. The wind was like a passionate caress, and, as she stretched there, she realized the peace and ecstasy of this bit dropped out of Paradise.

The evening was brilliant with stars scintillating in a sky of velvet, the air musical with the cry of crickets. Around her bungalow the lamps of the little cottages made golden pools amid the voluptuous verdure. In the rich darkness these patches of lustrous leafage had a fairylike effect. Sometimes through a screen of foliage she could see a whole family sewing or reading under the lamp—a scene of peaceful beauty. But other verandas were plunged in darkness, and from them came amorous sighs, and the glow of cigarette tips.

As she smoked her own cigarette she watched the moon climb up above the palms. Now it had cleared the highest fringe and paused to dream as if in love with its own loveliness. The crickets had ceased. There was a perfect stillness in the perfumed air. Sitting with her arms clasped round her knees, she dreamed and dreamed, heedless of time. . . .

What memories of sadness were haunting her! Was it a tear that glistened on her cheek?

"I think of you, my husband, as I have thought of you every day during nine long years. Every moment of our brief happiness I have lived over and over, and I know that the moon shining so tenderly down on me, shines on

the little white cross at the head of your grave. Oh, I'm lonely, Clive darling, so lonely. . .!"

The moon dreamed on. The night was buoyant with beauty, the air a caress. The silvery silence seemed to breathe Romance. In her little house, drowned in its exotic verdure, there came to her a sense of destiny.

"Where are you now, Clive dear? In what bright star? As I sit here I use all my mind to draw you near to me—not a ghostly 'you,' but a 'you' I can touch and hold, a 'you' with strong arms and lips that burn. . . ."

Ah! what was the use of thinking such things? It was wrong. One should reverence the dead, not seek to revive the moments of utter joy one has known.

Why did she feel like that? Was it that this strange, sensuous isle had already affected her? In this voluptuous air it seemed as if anything might happen, as if the last shred of her Puritanism might fall from her, and she should stand Pagan and unashamed.

"Land of Love and Languor! Garden of Desire! Will you saturate me with your indolence and your passion? Make me your own as you have done so many? Or am I of the sterner stuff that resists your lure? . . ."

Time would tell.

CHAPTER IV

THE CABIN

1.

THAT latest addition to the human jetsam of the beach, the stranger who called himself Jack, had secured a job unloading freight from the *Raratonga*. Now, more than a little weary, he was returning to his shack in the native quarter, carrying a sack of provisions. It would be good, after living on mangoes and bananas, to eat a little civilized food.

To his surprise he found squatting on the porch the girl Zelie. At sight of him she started up with a graceful greeting. Through the open door he could see that she had swept his bare room, and garnished it with flowers. Far from pleased he dumped down his sack, and instantly she swooped on it.

He went round to the back, where, under a primitive shower-bath, he could wash off the sweat and dust of toil. Oh, the joy of it! That priceless shower drumming on his brow, his chest, his spine. For a full ten minutes he let it beneficently beat. Now he was a new man again—cool, clean, crisp with energy.

He had two costumes for housewear. One was the native *pareu*, a loin-cloth of scarlet stamped with yellow flowers; the other a two-piece bathing suit. On this occasion he chose the bathing suit as being more decorous, though he expected to be alone. But on reëntering the hut he found

the girl still there. She had arranged his cans on the table, and was eagerly awaiting him.

A word as to Zelie. The blood of three races ran in her veins. Her grandmother, a famous hula-hula dancer, had been the mistress of a wealthy Chinaman. Her father was supposed to be a French naval officer, and her mother took early to that most ancient and (in Tahiti, at any rate) not least honorable of professions. Yet she would no doubt have educated the girl at the Convent, and married her decently had she not died suddenly during the influenza outbreak. Henceforward Zelie was left at the mercy of circumstances, which in Papeete are about as unfavorable to a moral issue as can be imagined. So at fourteen the girl took the almost inevitable road. Though working as a weaver of straw hats she had already accepted half a dozen lovers; but until the time Bad Marc saw and desired her, she had chosen no definite protector. Conceive of her, then, as the victim of environment, and be not too censorious.

The beachcomber called Jack regarded Zelie with some discomfort. He did not want to order her away, and he did not want her to stay. Yet it was evident that unless she was ordered off Zelie intended to stay. So he lit his pipe and considered her.

Laughingly she looked at him. One after another she held up the tins. Corn beef, salmon, pork and beans—what would he have? Leaving the choice to her, she decided on a tin of very pink salmon and another of very green peas. The peas she warmed on his little oil-stove, and this, with a loaf of fresh bread, was the meal she set out for him.

He could do no less than ask her to share it, but she refused.

"Me already eat. Me full all way up here," she said, pointing to her throat.

Still wondering, he went on with his meal. When it was

finished he lit up again and fell to watching her. She had squatted on his sleeping-mat and was weaving a hat—a quiet, demure, reserved figure. She would take a broad band of glistening straw, and with a pin shred it into long narrow ribbons. He could not but admire the deft precision with which she did this. She tied the whole with a loose knot, then selecting several strands twisted them in and out around her fingers. She did not speak, but from time to time she stole an admiring look at him. After a while he took up a book and fell to reading. It was a ragged copy of *Lavengro*, left in the cabin by some previous tenant. He plunged deep in it, pipe in mouth, forgetting her.

She looked more boldly at him now. She saw the grace of the long, lean frame, the sinewy arms, the sloping shoulders. She noted his ivory skin, his dark hair that curled from the roots, his milk-white teeth clutching the pipe. A wonderful man, she thought; her man, her master. Had he not fought for her? Had he not won her?

By-and-by she rose. She washed the dishes, tidied up the room. Her rising roused him, and covertly he watched her. As she moved about, her frock of white calico showed the outline of her form; and once when she stood against the sunlight he saw the silhouette of her lithe, brown body.

When she had finished she came and stood before him humbly.

"You not want me to-night? If you want me I stay."

He shook his head.

"No? All right. . . . When you want me I come. I belong you now. I do for you. Wash, clean, cook, sew. Dat man Marc want me. I no like him. I like you."

She seemed to take it so naturally that he was too surprised to protest. Then she held out her hand.

"Good-night, now. I come to-morrow."

She bent over and kissed his hand; then she was gone, leaving him to stare after her retreating figure.

"Well, I'm blowed," he muttered.

Then he added savagely: "*Damn!*"

2.

The day following he locked the door behind him, and avoided returning till after dark. The girl was a nuisance. He would have to be forever dodging her. He was working on the wharf sacking cocoanuts, and eating at a Chinaman's. With him were a Tahitian and a Raratongan. They laughed all day long, and never seemed to tire.

He gloried in this muscular toil that left his mind free. He could work all day and read half the night. Reading was a passion with him. Before all things he wanted knowledge. He would improve himself, cultivate himself. What for? That didn't matter. Knowledge for its own sake. Culture, too. Science, philosophy, art, he would read and read. Perhaps in ten years, in twenty years even, he would be worth something intellectually. Meantime he would make enough to live, and study, study.

But the cocoanut job panned out, and once more he knew lean days. No more hearty feeds at the Chinaman's. No more canned delicacies from the States. Only a tin of hardtack remained to him, and this he eked out with the fruit he could pick up anywhere. After all, when one is loafing, one can do with next to nothing. Give him a biscuit or two, a mug of coffee, some bananas, and a good book—he was as happy as a reasonable man can reasonably expect to be.

Still keeping away from the cabin he spent long hours on a bench by the sea. When his book began to bore him, he would gaze dreamily out to the gemlike little islet in the

lagoon, and beyond it to the sparkle of reef-foam. Already he felt the languor of the island invading him. No doubt in time he would become like the rest of them, indolent and unresisting. He would end up a picturesque hermit, a nature-man, one of those originals to be found on all the islands.

To combat this insidious lassitude he went for long tramps. He would fatigue himself, return late, and lock his door. Of the girl Zelie he knew no more. No doubt she had come in his absence and had taken the lesson of the closed door. She must have pride of a sort. He was well out of that. Of Macara and his gang he saw nothing; but he avoided their haunts, and, maybe, they thought he had gone out to the districts.

He ceased to bathe in the dock, but nearly every day he would walk to a beach a little way out of town. The heat was usually tempered by a strong wind. He passed bungalows snuggling in exotic greenery. Groves of cocoanut and banana palms alternated with the bread-fruit and mango-trees. Everywhere flamed the hibiscus in a dozen varieties.

One day, as he swung along in cotton shirt and khaki trousers, hatless and shoeless, he met a slim, graceful girl in white. She was shading herself with a huge Japanese parasol, and as she passed she peered at him curiously. After all, he was only a beachcomber. He belonged to the human scum of the port. He felt ashamed in the presence of the better people, and he never looked one of their women in the face. Now, as he passed this young lady, he turned away his head, and somehow he flushed under his tan. No doubt she was that American girl who had landed from the *Raratonga*.

When he reached the beach the surf was strong. Giant rollers were crashing on the dark sands. It was a roaring scene of wind and sun and foam. But the water was too

warm for enjoyment, and after an hour of swimming he became bored. So he floated just beyond the surf, and dreamed with shoreward gazing eyes.

The massed groves of the cocoanut palm were flailing in the high wind; the pale, green hills rose in ridge and crease; beyond were mountains dark, gloomy, mysterious. But it was that curving, palm-girt beach that gave the keynote to it all.

Somewhat enervated he stretched on the sand and let the sun beat down on him. His whole body was taking on a golden color, so that with his bronzed face he was becoming more and more like a native.

Another day he was returning from his bath when he overtook the tall American girl. She was sauntering along with a very magnificent Frenchman, and they were evidently on the best of terms. The man was in immaculate white, a handsome, dashing fellow, probably one of the *fonctionnaires.*

As the beachcomber passed their merry chaff ceased for a moment. Evidently they were studying him as a peg for further conversation. Just as he was striding out of earshot he heard the Frenchman utter the words "*canaille,*" "*vaurien,*" then a sharp "Hush!" from the girl. Luckily he did not understand, or he would have turned and confronted them.

3.

One evening he reached the cabin a little earlier than usual. After a simple supper worthy of a philosopher, he filled his pipe rather moodily. He was feeling lonely this night. A bitterness and despair he had not known since he had landed on the island assailed him. He had cut from a

magazine a poem and pasted it on the wall. It was Chesterton's *The Last Hero.* He began to read aloud:

"The wind blew out from Bergen from the dawning to the day,
There was a wreck of trees and fall of towers a score of miles
away,
And drifted like a livid leaf I go before its tide,
Spewed out of house and stable, beggared of flag and
bride. . . ."

He stopped. The door had opened and Zelie stood there.

She seemed to have changed her rôle. No longer was she the meek, mothlike weaver of straw. Rather, a butterfly in a bright gown of flowered muslin, with round, sparkling eyes and a merry gleam of teeth. She carried a guitar.

"I come play for you. I think you too much sad to-night."

After all, he was glad to see her again; so once more she squatted on his sleeping mat, and fell to tuning her guitar. Soon she began to strum softly. Like most Tahitians, she was a born musician, and she played with grace and skill. Like most of the women, too, her hands were finely formed. As he watched them weaving over the strings with delicate, lifting touches, he thought how small and white and dainty they were.

In a little she began to sing. Her voice, though not very strong, was soft and sweet. She sang melodies peculiar to the island in a way that was strangely charming. He watched her with a growing pleasure. As she bent over the instrument he noted the pearly whiteness of her skin, due, no doubt, to the Chinese strain in her. Over her high brow her ebony black hair was parted in two thick braids. Her eyes were dark, soft, melting. Her nose was well formed; her lips a little thick, but parted in such a dazzling smile. Her ears were small and flat to the head.

Through the haze of the fichu she wore round her shoulders he could see a bosom of ripe fullness. Really, in her exotic way, the girl was vividly alluring.

Suddenly she laid down her guitar and came close to him. The laughing light had gone from her eyes. They were dark pools of passion now. Around her brows she wore a white-petaled wreath, and the sweetness of its perfume made his senses swim. Scarcely knowing what he did he lifted the fichu gently so that it rested on her hair.

There! She looked like a bride—a bride waiting at the altar.

For whom? . . .

Softly she gazed up at him, and her eyes were full of appeal.

"Take me," she whispered; then hung her head.

He could possess her if he willed, this soft, lovely creature. She was his, ready to serve him, to adore him. And now gravely she lifted from her hair the white wreath and put it round his brows. So she stood before him, her hands resting lightly on his shoulders, her lips tremulous, her eyes almost reproachful in their melting appeal.

He was about to crush her madly in his arms when suddenly he stopped. He was staring blankly, past and beyond her. What was this he was seeing, clear before him, blotting out all else? . . .

In the scornful sunset the Calvary stood black and bodeful. An old woman clutched the base of the Cross, her face, ivory white, profiled against the age-corroded stone. By her side with arms around her was an exquisite girl, soothing her, caressing her. And now the girl turned her face towards him and it was full of angry scorn . . .

"More lovely than the living flowers the hatred in her eyes."

Ah! why should that scene come back now? His mother was dead. The past with all its pain was dead. Why should it come to haunt him here?

With a cry of pain he broke from Zelie and rushed into the night. He walked madly on, he knew not where. It must have been hours after when he wore himself out.

He was standing on a point of rock high above the sea. The tender moon was dreaming, the lagoon a lake of silver. On it, as if suspended, a native floated in his slim canoe. In the soft moon glaze Moorea was an isle of mystery. The stillness of the gleaming palms, the vast glamour of the sea, the mighty silence . . . it was enchantment, dream.

He drew a deep breath. So much beauty, so much peace! Surely here there was something for him—Peace.

It was dawn when he reached the cabin again. The girl was gone, but on the floor he found a bruised and broken wreath.

CHAPTER V

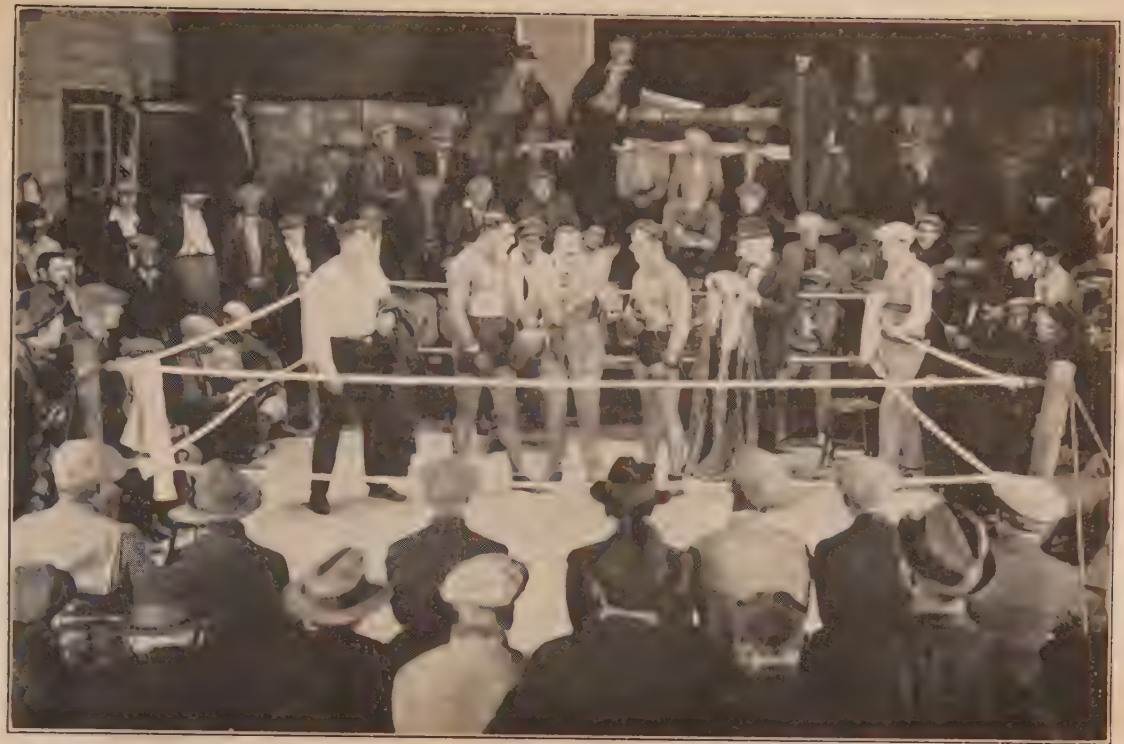
THE TAHITIAN DON JUAN

1.

ALTHOUGH Felicity had been in Papeete only three weeks, she was already getting the feeling of the place. It was a painter's paradise; an orgy of color. Everywhere perfect pictures met the eye. She was burning to paint, but decided she must first steep herself in the atmosphere.

She was quite at home now in her little bungalow, and felt as if she had been there for ages. Strange how the outside world seemed to become unreal. Revolution might rage, pestilence prevail, Presidents and prize-fighters rise and fall—what did it matter here? These things were as if they were not, strange shadows on a screen. Here were realities—the soft sea, the dreamy sky, the swaying palms, inexhaustible sweetness. Soon the boat would come again with letters, newspapers, echoes of a world half-mad. Somehow she no longer looked forward to her mail, wanted to evade it even. Better if the boat only touched once a year, so that she could go on in this lotus-eater's dream, amid scenes of ideal beauty.

Sitting on her balcony she wore her airiest kimonos; but, in any case, everything around her was waving and fluttering in the breeze. Bunches of mangoes, green and faintly tinted with rose, swung idly. On a bread-fruit tree, very high up, she watched a native astride a bough. With a long forked pole he detached the green globes of fruit,



A William Fox Production.

JUST BEFORE THE FATAL FIGHT.

The Roughneck.

while below a little girl in a white frock picked them up for supper. A boy, naked but for a loin-cloth, passed riding a bicycle. Some mina birds swooped down and disputed with the chickens for food. A starved-looking cat watched them hungrily; for it is to be feared it lived mostly on mangoes.

Mangoes littered the road, and the workmen going home picked the best for dessert. Yonder was a group of children, squatting in the gutter and eating them. Some were Tahitians, some Chinese. The Tahitians had mops of tousled hair, big velvet eyes, thick lips, brown skin, and large strong limbs. The Chinese children had straight, crow-black hair, slant eyes, yellow skin, fine limbs. The contrast was piquant.

Always the waterfront drew her. She loved to watch the vagabond schooners, moored to the old cannons planted mouth skyward in the bank. What rare adventurers, these little lazy schooners! What Odysseys could be written about them, their half-caste captains steering by the stars as they picked up copra in the thousand islands that stud the sea!

The grass grew green to the low sea-wall of coral, and in the crystal waters she saw shoals of tiny fishes that reminded her of gems. Some might have been carved from lapis-lazuli, while others were like bibelots of bright enamel.

But her gaze inevitably went out to the reef. Against the horizon she saw the water rise to a long blue ridge. In its hollow as it advanced the sun darted a silver lance. Then at one end it seemed to rear in a hump of dazzling foam. This charged down the line for all the world like an angry monster, leaving a snowy rampart in its wake. The rampart subsided to a foamy parapet, then this too melted away into the serene glitter of the sea.

She was not the only one who loved to watch the combers come magnificently in. There was another, a tall, strapping fellow of the race of beachcombers. Him she often saw sitting under a hibiscus bough out by the old fort. Generally, though, he was deep in a book. She noticed him because of his fine physique. Could he be induced, she wondered, to pose for her?

She took dinner at one or other of the two hotels. One night it was the Diadem; the next, the Tiare. There was little to choose between them, save that at the first she got tough chicken, and at the second tough beef. In both there were about the same number of ants in the soup. But it made a pleasant meal out there on the veranda, with the cool breeze creeping through the foliage, and the stars swarming like children in the playground of the sky.

She elevated her feet, though. Cockroaches. Huge ones they were, scuttling across the floor. There was a kitten that loved to tease them, tapping them with a playful paw, and cavorting round them as they tried to evade it. Indignant cockroaches. She kept her heels in the rungs of her chair.

After dinner she would light a cigarette and stroll along the waterfront in the moonlight. On the coral parapet natives were fishing. Under the electric light, with their scarlet and gold *pareus* wrapped round their loins, the men looked like statues of copper. In their palm-leaf baskets tiny fishes glistened, while great brown cockroaches ran swiftly over the hot stone. The up-pointed cannons were burning to the hand. Looking more romantic than ever the little schooners rocked in the moonlight, and from the mystery of shadow, mingled with the plash of little waves, came the sensuous thrum of mandolin and guitar.

Then she would go home, sit in her bungalow, and have

the most thrilling adventures. One night she had quite a series of them.

First it was a cockroach that flew in at the window, and ran swiftly up and down the floor. She gazed at it with horror, till it stopped and seemed to go into a trance. Now was her time. She approached it from behind, determined to end its interesting career. Alas! it evaded the fatal foot, and scurried across the boards with a scuttling sound. Once again she made the attempt. It cracked crisply under her slipper. It seemed to contain no juice—a dry horny envelope of a creature.

Well, anyway, there it was—dead. But to make sure, she stamped on it a second time. Imagine then her surprise when, on looking round a few minutes later, she saw it was gone. An extraordinary instance of vitality, she thought. All at once she beheld it a few feet further along the floor, slowly moving to a crevice in the woodwork. Then she saw that it was being dragged by a small army of infinitesimal ants that had appeared as if from nowhere. So Nature worked with ferocious swiftness, and the drama of life and death was speeded up to the limit.

A little later she gave a start, and gazed fearfully at the wall. Motionless, as if it were painted, was a tiny yellow lizard. She could see the five toes of each foot as they gripped the smooth surface. In its saffron head its eyes, like black shining gems, seemed to regard her, and its citron-colored body quivered delicately. It was a gekko. Recovering from her first fright she watched the bright little thing darting here and there after moths and mosquitoes.

But there was still another trial for her nerves, already rather unstrung. Suddenly there appeared on the mosquito-curtain of her bed a gigantic spider. Now she had a hereditary horror of spiders, and this seemed as huge as

a saucer. It ran with incredible rapidity, and appeared to be pursuing her. She shrieked with fear. Perhaps some of the neighbors would hear and come to her aid. Again she screamed. Then there was a bounding step on the balcony, and *he* appeared.

He was a tall man, dressed in immaculate white, and he took in the situation at a glance.

"I am here," he cried. "What is it? Where is it?"

She pointed to the horrible creature. Intrepidly he pounced on it and hurled it from the door.

"Thank Heaven!" she cried. "You arrived just in the nick of time. Another moment and I should have fainted gracefully away. You deserve the Legion of Honor for that."

He bowed. "It is honor enough," he said, "to have served so lovely a lady."

She returned his bow. "You are as gallant as you are brave. I will never forget your fearless dash to my rescue."

2.

He did not allow her to forget it, for from that time he pursued her assiduously. He was called Hyacinthe Beauregard, and he was half French, half Tahitian. He had been educated in Paris, and owned a big plantation somewhere in the north of the island. However, he spent most of his time in Papeete, where he had a great reputation as a lady-killer.

"No doubt," mused Felicity, "he has marked me down as his next victim." It was this thought made her flirt a little recklessly. She would draw him on just to see how far he would go, then check him as she well knew how. An amusing game, dangerous perhaps; but, then, she always liked to play with fire.

Monsieur Beauregard, or "Hyacinthe," as she called him to herself, told her something about spiders.

"They are," he said, "your best friends. You must on no account kill them, as they destroy the mosquitoes. You must look on them with gentle interest and seek to win their trust. Indeed, I have one that eats flies out of my hand."

"I will try to regard them in that way," she promised humbly. "In time I may even come to develop a real affection for them."

Then she questioned him about the manners and customs of the Island, and he told her many interesting things, though it evidently bored him to do so. He would rather talk about love and Paris. Like most of those with native blood in their veins, he affected to despise the native. He would have her consider him a polished gentleman. She did not think, however, that one would have to rub the polish very hard to come on the savage.

After all, he had suave manners and was rather amusing in his way. A tall fine man, a little inclined to fat. He was, of course, very black-haired and swarthy of skin. He had the most sensuous eyes she had ever seen. They fairly goggled with sensuousness. His lips, too, were thick and a little blobby—voluptuous lips. No doubt the local ladies found him irresistible, and he went his conquering way, leaving behind him a trail of broken hearts.

There was a little lonely cabin she sometimes passed on the road to her bungalow, and one afternoon, happening to glance in the doorway, whom should she see but her stalwart beachcomber. He wore only one of these red and white loin-cloths, *pareus* they called them. Thus revealed, he really had a superbly developed body. Again she wondered if she couldn't get him to pose for her.

She suggested it to Hyacinthe, but the half-caste was

discouraging. Beachcombers, he told her, were the most bloodthirsty ruffians, and the beachcombers of Tahiti in particular were the scourings of the seas.

"I wonder," she thought. "Is my beachcomber such a desperado? True he was bearded and bronzed enough. She knew what he reminded her of—a buccaneer. Well, she would sooner trust herself with her buccaneer than with Hyacinthe."

One day the desire came over her to paint, so she set up her easel on the beach and began a sketch of Moorea. Curious to think that she owned quite a big strip of coastland over there. It had never been anything but an expense to her, and she regarded it rather with disgust. However, she determined one of these days she would go over and make the acquaintance of her property. There was no hurry. The island wouldn't run away.

So she was happily working at her sketch, when raising her eyes whom should she see but—her buccaneer. He was sitting on a bench near by, with a book in his hand, and staring at her in a most curious way. Yet when he saw her look up he lowered his eyes quickly to his book. And every time she glanced his way she would find him regarding her with that same fixed stare.

It got on her nerves finally, so that she rose and, going over to the bench, seated herself beside him.

"Don't move, please," she said, as he got up to go away. Silently he sat down again, and his eyes sought his book. She lit a cigarette and blew some rings, as with a sidelong look she studied him. He had no hat and the sun had lightened in places his dark, curly hair. One could not tell much about his face with all that beard, but it looked strong and determined. His frame was finely athletic. He might have posed for a Roman gladiator, she thought. It was she who broke the silence.

"If you are short of books," she ventured, "I have some novels I have finished with."

He raised his eyes and stared out at the reef. Then she saw that what he was reading was Plato's *Republic*.

"Thanks," he said at last in a curiously subdued voice, "I don't read novels."

"A jolly good snub for me," she thought, so she went on almost timidly:

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Are you a College man?"

Still staring at the reef he shook his head rather sadly.

"No, I'm trying now to get the chance I didn't get when I was young."

"I see. . . . Have a cigarette?"

"No, thank you. I have my pipe."

He bent down and picked up one of those tiny hermit crabs that were crawling among the coral clinkers in such numbers. He looked at it thoughtfully as if he were studying it.

"I wonder if you'd mind posing for me?" she said at last. "I'd take it as a great favor."

Gently he put the crab down again and stared reefwards.

"I don't know. . . . I'm going away soon."

"Well, then, when you come back? Might I ask your name? Mine's Arden, Felicity Arden."

He hesitated. His rather severe mouth had a whimsical twist. "Jack."

Then he glanced up at the pale blue sky, where hung the faint thin bubble of the moon.

"Jack Moon," he added.

A moment after he rose and went away, and she returned to her sketch.

"So that's my beachcomber, my buccaneer," she said thoughtfully. "Jack Moon."

CHAPTER VI

JACK MOON IS HAUNTED

1.

IT was the girl of the poppy field.

The moment he saw her seated before the easel he knew it. The beach was blotted out, the opalescent lagoon, the emerald hills. The poppies were a rippling sheen of scarlet that framed her in their radiant glow. He visioned it all as if it were yesterday.

During the past year he had thought of her less and less, until he almost believed he was beginning to forget her. Yet somehow at the back of his mind he had a feeling that he would see her again. Had she not said that some day she would visit the island? Perhaps unconsciously he had been awaiting her coming.

He paced up and down his cabin, agitated and perplexed. Above all he wanted to ask about his mother. He knew that in the year following his sudden disappearance this girl had supported the old woman, surrounded her with every comfort, even paid the expenses of her burial. What must she think of him? A base deserter! Dead! No, probably she did not think at all, had long ago dismissed the episode from her mind.

Anyway, there was no danger of her recognizing him. Even Chick would not know him now. And Chick, too, was dead—heart failure. All, all were dead, for the Past itself was dead. Above everything Jerry Delane was dead. Let him remain so.

So Jack Moon, the beachcomber, strode up and down his cabin, scourged by merciless memories. . . . And he had imagined he had gotten away from all that, become a new man in a new land. Why not? Cannot one change one's personality, become both in mind and body something entirely different? Are we not all playing parts? Why cannot we take up a new rôle, step out of the old, recreate ourselves? Alas! behind all our transformations there remains the steadfast soul.

And yet . . . the man that was Jack Moon was not the man that had been Jerry Delane. It was five years ago, and in that time do not the very tissues of the body alter? He had other feelings; thought with another mind. He could look back at his old self objectively. He was sure that if Jerry Delane were to step from the shadows and stand with Jack Moon, no stranger could see any link between them. Well, at least, *she* should not see it. He would go away at once. He would never meet her again.

He still thought of her as a girl, but now he realized that she, too, had changed. Her face was firmer in outline, more mature. Yet there was the same self-reliance in it, the same frank, gay pride. Yes, she, too, had altered—a little, not overmuch. Ah, well! he was glad he had seen her again, just once more. She had become an ideal with him, a star in his stormiest sky. And so she would always be. But he must not encounter her any more. To-morrow he would go.

2.

He sat in the darkness, his face buried in his hands. He did not see that quite suddenly the stars were blotted out. A minatory chill crept through the open window. The rain!

It fairly swooped down. There was a patter in the

bread-fruit trees, a leaden drumming, a thunderous roar. In its relentless fury it was like buck-shot volleyed on the corrugated iron roof. Down each groove of the metal ran a steady stream. In front of his porch the streams were like harpstrings, tight and gleaming in the lamplight, crystal bars enclosing him as in a prison.

The rain, the rain! How it raved on the roof. Sitting there with bent head he thought of his poem:

"The heavens are bowed above my head, shouting like seraph wars,
With rains that might put out the sun and clean the sky of stars;
Rains like the fall of ruined seas from secret worlds above,
The roaring of the rains of God none but the lonely love. . . ."

He did not see a shadow by the door. For some time it had been there. It was the girl Zelie, who had been watching him. Now she sank on the floor beside him. She let her head rest against his knee. Her hair was wet with rain, and she was just a poor shabby girl in a drab wrapper with nothing but misery in her eyes. He reached down and stroked her hair gently, and she took his hand and kissed it, holding it to her cheek.

"Ah! we're both lonely to-night," he said.

He felt her tears warm on his hand, and gentle sobs shook her.

"Are you, too, sad?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

She told him. "That man, Marc, say you no want me. He want me. I must come him. If I not come he beat me; maybe, he kill me. I'm 'fraid; very much 'fraid. . . ."

After all, why not? It seemed destiny. He had never done good to anyone in his life. Why not save this girl, pull her out of the mire into which she was sinking, make

a good woman of her? He did not love her, but he thought he could be fairly contented with her. They would live on a little plantation far from the white people. She would bear him children, and he would make them happy. Then, because the only real joy in life is bringing joy to others, he too would glean his share of happiness. Why not? . . .

"Zelie," he said at last, "would you care for me if you knew I was a very bad man?"

"You not bad man. I never believe that."

"But if I had done something terrible—killed a man, say?"

"What of that? That not bad, kill man. My great-grandfather, he big chief. Kill one hundred men. Very big chief."

"Well, I've killed one man. That's why I'm here. Murder they would call it back there. Perhaps put me in the chair for it. But I don't know. He was a very bad man. He had done me and mine injury beyond repair. And I killed him in fair fight . . . in the dark . . ."

His stormy eyes were blank with vision as he stared past her. He went on musingly:

"What does it matter? It was far away and long ago. I'm here now with my life still before me, and a chance to do some good. Why not? . . ."

He was going to bend over and take her in his arms when suddenly he heard a rush, and two people gained the porch. He looked up. The girl of the beach was standing in the doorway. At sight of Zelie she stopped, would have retreated.

"I didn't know," she faltered. "I thought you were alone. The rain caught us and we rushed for the nearest shelter."

With some confusion he rose. Zelie shrank away.

"I'm glad to . . ." he began, then broke off vaguely.

"My home is very poor. Please excuse it. This is the only chair I have to offer you."

But she would not enter.

"No, we will remain on the porch, if you don't mind. It will be over in a minute. These tropical downpours cease as quickly as they begin."

He heard them talking in French. It was the tall half-caste he had already seen her with. A rich planter, a local libertine—they said he numbered his children by the score. She might know that to go with such a man was fatal to her reputation. Well, that was her affair.

He was sure the half-breed was talking about him, talking against him, but he could not understand. He was right. What the man was saying was this:

"You are foolish to take any interest in the fellow. It is evident what he is, how he lives. All these loafers have women whom they compel to earn money for them. The girl you see is one of the lowest in the town. This man is like all the rest, perhaps worse. You know our French term—a *maquereau.*"

Felicity was silent. For a long time she stood gazing into the rain, which was still falling with violence. Then at last she turned to Jack Moon.

"I think we will go now. It seems to be clearing. Thanks, many thanks. Good-evening."

But there was in her tone an icy politeness, and as she turned away her face was expressive of disgust.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECRET JOURNAL OF FELICITY ARDEN

FELICITY ARDEN was horribly disappointed in her beachcomber. He turned out to be quite a low-class person, not a bold buccaneer at all. A vicious bully. Well, it would be a lesson to her, and if ever again she met Jack Moon he would take his place as part of the landscape.

When she thought of the interest she had suddenly developed in him she was cross; then cross with herself for being cross. A little humiliated, too; rather surprised at the depth of the disgust she felt for him.

However, there was little chance of encountering him just then, for they were enjoying such a surfeit of "liquid sunshine" that dreaming under the eaves of a bungalow seemed wiser than seeking impressions further afield. How it did rain! It came with no warning. Without preliminary patter it was at highest pressure. On the iron roofs it raged with a ferocity that made conversation difficult. It descended in glassy sheets from the eaves, and the ground soaked it up like a sponge. For the moment it cooled the air deliciously, but when the sun came out again it was as suffocating as a vapor bath.

So, being unable to paint, she absorbed atmosphere from her balcony, and made entries in her journal. Let us just peep into that somewhat frank and indiscreet record, with its morocco binding and silver clasp that locked with a key.

"I watch the women. Their bosoms are opulent, and they regard the men with soft, lascivious eyes. Even the

humblest walks with dignity. Their feet are planted on the ground with certitude, and each separate toe fulfils its function. Their breasts are out-thrust, their heads thrown back. They almost seem to sail past, there is such a rhythm in their movement. . . .

"The fresh banana leaf is very beautiful. The central stem is a bow with a sheathing of golden light; the leaf blades are like twilled silk, greenly diaphanous. They flutter like banners tenderly translucent; but soon the wind tears them to ribbons, and a whole plantation has a rag-tag look. . . .

"I think the mina is the happiest, cheekiest bird in the world. He is like a chocolate blackbird, with cream wing and tail feathers. He knows no fear, and his cheery chirp is heard on every hand. Hyacinthe tells me they were brought from Japan to kill wasps, but they ignored the wasps, and drove all the other birds away. At first they were protected, but now their lives are no longer respected. A good thing they did, though—they destroyed the cattle flies. They are the horse's best friend, and you often see a pony with one of these pert birds perched on his back. . . .

"Men pass with elephantiasis. Their bodies are emaciated, but their legs from the knee down are swollen till they look like the legs of an elephant. Hyacinthe tells me it is called 'fay-fay.' He knows several white men who have it, though the stranger is supposed to be immune for two years. It consists of layers of fat, which may be cut away. However, the radical cure is to go to a cold country. . . .

"Hyacinthe still pursues me, and I fear I am being talked about in high Papeete society. I notice some of the local ladies giving me a stony stare. Perhaps they think I am a wild woman, because I smoke cigarettes in the street and go about with men. I wonder what they would do if they knew I was cousin to a Secretary of State, and

wealthy enough to buy up half the town. It's such fun when people don't know who you are. . . .

"I wonder what Hyacinthe thinks. I tell him, of course, I'm only a poor painter. I'm sure he reckons I'm 'easy,' ready to drop, as it were, like ripe fruit into his hand. Well, the dear man has a hard fall coming to him one of these days. I suppose I should check him before he goes too far, but really he amuses me awfully. . . .

"I have not met again that horrid beachcomber, though I have twice strolled along the beach. Every evening about six I go to see the sun paint a gorgeous picture around Moorea. The palms on the point are etched inkily against the liquid gold of sky and sea, and with the glow behind it the outline of the island is wildly beautiful. Momently the colors change. Delicate mauve shimmers into lilac, the sea is wine-dark, the horizon a mysterious purple. Clouds kindle and cast a copper glow on the lagoon; the spars of a schooner flicker as if they would burst into flame. The cloud fleece turns from gold to rose. The sky changes from a piercing blue to an ethereal green, then swiftly the darkness falls. . . .

"Mysterious Moorea! When shall I know it? . . .

"Last night I went with Hyacinthe to one of the cinemas, the bamboo one. Its walls are of bamboo poles, like a cage, so that the air enters freely. Though the place was crammed there was not the faintest odor of 'native.'

"Most of the women had floppy dresses marvelously laundered. No wonder. I had seen some of these dusky belles, clad only in *pareus*, squatted all afternoon on the balconies of their cottages wielding the iron lymphatically. It had taken hours of indolent industry to produce that dazzling whiteness from which rose velvety brown shoulders. In the dusk of their hair gleamed starry blossoms.

"As the light went down there was an expectant hush. It was a Wallie Reid film, with a race between a train and an automobile. As the titling was in English there were two interpreters—one French, one Tahitian. The Frenchman had the first go; then the Tahitian had his turn, and, whether or not he profited by the explanation of his colleague, he was infinitely more dramatic. There was a ring of triumph in his voice as the climax approached, as if he, too, were a part of the picture, and he, too, were swaying this ardent multitude. There they were, bent forward, tense, rapt. Brown hands were clenched, brown eyes shining. Exclamations burst from them, growing more explosive as the film increased in excitement. As the car shot like lightning through the crossing, just clearing the cow-catcher of the express by an inch, there was a frenzied howl from every throat. From there to the end there was no holding them. They were up in their seats, hooting, shrieking, yelling, till the final crisis came. Then with a huge sigh of relief their quivering nerves seemed to relax.

"The next film was a Chaplin one. With what roaring convulsions of mirth it was received! Open mouthed, with tears running down their cheeks, the entire audience rocked to and fro. They laughed until their ribs ached, and when it ended in an orgy of pie-throwing it seemed as if they had all gone mad with hilarious delight.

"They were just like a lot of children. And to think of it! They had never seen a train, an aëroplane, a skyscraper. In that magic mirror was all the marvel of civilization. Little wonder they went crazy with delight. . . .

"At last it has come off—the discomfiture of my Tahitian Don Juan. Heaven knows it was dramatic enough, more like a scene from Bataille or Bernstein than a bit of real life. Never again. Let it be a lesson to you, Felicity Arden!

"To begin with, I admit my fault. I laid myself open to it, but I did not think the man was such a cad. And I'm afraid the danger isn't over; that being thwarted once, he will do something desperate to get at me again. You can tell nothing about these mixed bloods. The savage is always there, a brute beast crouching like a tiger in the jungle of their passions.

"For some days before he had been particularly nice, and I was having less and less occasion to rebuke him. Indeed, I was beginning to think that I had tamed my Tahitian. Alas! it was only the lull before the storm.

"We dined together at a weird Chinese restaurant on curried prawns and champagne. He behaved in a most gentlemanly manner, but I noticed he kept gazing at me with his big dark eyes. Perhaps he thought to hypnotize me. At the same time he insisted on filling my glass with champagne. Twice when he was not looking, I tilted it over the balcony.

"He has a large amber-colored hand, not badly formed, and well manicured. On the little finger sparkled a ring with a diamond bigger than a peanut.

" 'I like to see men wearing diamonds,' I said, knowing he was impervious to irony. 'It looks so distinguished, so affluent. It's awful to be a poor painter girl, and not able to afford jewelry.'

"He held out his saffron paw so that I might better admire the sparkler.

" 'You don't wear any,' he said rather patronizingly.

" 'No,' I sighed. 'I had some nice things, but I had to pop them. Now, alas! they're gone beyond redemption.'

" 'You don't even wear your wedding ring,' he remarked.

" 'Really, you noticed that! Not to-night, anyway. I don't always put it on. You see, I lived so long in the Latin Quarter that I care little for conventions.'

"'Many people don't know you are a widow. They think you are an unmarried woman.'

"'Do they, indeed? I don't see what difference it makes.'

"'It doesn't—to me. I love widows.'

"'Men usually do. I never could understand why.'

"'It's because . . .' Here he stopped, and in the subdued light I could see his eyes glisten. He was gazing at me harder than ever. Yes, he seemed to be actually gloating over me. He even licked his lascivious lips. He tried to take my hand, but I turned my cigarette so that he burned his finger slightly.

"'Oh, I *am* sorry,' I said innocently. 'But about widows? . . .'

"He sucked the injured finger solicitously. Then taking it out of his mouth he went on:

"'Men love them because they understand the game and play it with open eyes; because they're dangerous. They're softer than the dove and wiser than . . .'

"'The serpent! Pity Eve hadn't been a widow. But . . . go on.'

"'Some men have a prejudice against them. Foolish. Is the wine any the less sweet because another has broached the cask?'

"Hound! I would pay him for that. But I controlled my rage and answered sweetly: 'You flatter me, dear man.'

"He forgot his finger. He bent forward.

"'You madden me, dearest woman. Come. I have my car outside. Let's go for a spin in the moonlight.'

"'I'd love to. But . . . can you drive? We've finished the champagne.'

"'Trust me,' he answered with exultation in his voice.

"He has a nice French car and he drove dashingly. Once he tried to put his arm around my waist, but that

nice car immediately swerved in and attempted to climb up a cocoanut palm. After that Hyacinthe left me alone and gave it his strict attention.

"Then I forgot everything in the joy of the drive. As we swished along under hushed groves, past gleaming beaches, shattering the silver silence, I felt only the magic spell of the beauty about me. Adorable Isle! what words have I to tell of your wonders! your splendors of sunset and moonrise, your eternal loveliness of sea and sky. . . .

"It was about ten when we got back to my bungalow.

" 'Won't you come in for a few minutes?' I said. 'I'll make you a rum punch.'

"Leaving his car on the road, we went up the garden together. My bungalow is a little isolated, and there came a thought that perhaps at this hour, when Papeete sleeps, it would have been more prudent to say good-by at the gate. But it was too late to draw back. We were already in the bungalow, and he had switched on the light. He helped me off with my cloak.

" 'Make yourself at home,' I said.

"I took from a palm-leaf basket one of their little green limes, and squeezed it into a tumbler. I added brown sugar, then the rum of the country, then soda-water, with a clicking lump of ice.

" 'There you are! I don't know if I've made it nicely. It takes one of your Tahitian ladies to compose a perfect punch.'

" 'Oh, them . . . *poof!*' He snorted contemptuously. 'But aren't you having one?'"

" 'No, it would keep me awake. I'll take a little soda and a cigarette.'

"Over his glass he sat staring at me. His big black eyes seemed to protrude. Indeed, they goggled voluptuously. It was one of those disrobing gazes, and under it I began

to grow restive, even angry. So I rose, and taking a large pestle-shaped stone from the table I showed it to him.

"'What do you think of that? I bought it to-day.'

"'It's a *poi* crusher. It must have come from the Marquesas. Probably it's hundreds of years old.'

"I took it back and weighed it in my hand.

"'If one had a husband it would be a good thing to threaten him with occasionally,' I said.

"'Savage! And what about a lover?'

"'In my lexicon there's no such word,' I answered mockingly.

"Suddenly he rose. He went to the door and, to my amazement, he turned the key.

"'Here! . . . What have you done?'

"'Locked the door'—triumphantly.

"'But . . . you mean to say . . .' Rage was choking me.

"'I mean to say that this has gone on long enough. We've got to have an understanding, here, now.'

"'Have we?' My voice was breathless with fury, but he didn't notice it.

"'Yes. I adore you, madly, passionately. I am rich. I can give you jewels. Ay, even like this on my finger.'

"He flashed the atrocious ring at me. I suddenly grew calm.

"'What do you propose?' I demanded.

"'I have a yacht and a pearl island, an atoll only twenty-four hours' sail from here. We will go there together, to-morrow. But to-night you will be mine, all mine. You will reward me for my weeks of devotion.'

"He stood between me and the other door. I was nicely trapped. He advanced on me with arms outspread.

"'Well, what do you say?'

"I snatched up the *poi* crusher.

"'I say . . . if you don't stand back and open that door I'll smash in your ugly face with this stone.'

"He stared at me unbelievingly. Then he made a dash for the *poi* crusher. I launched it with all my force, but alas! it missed him by a hair, and the next moment he had me in his arms.

"'I always knew you were a savage,' he panted. 'But I, too, am a savage. We are well matched.'

"He was hugging me to him, trying to press his big, juicy lips to my cheek. How I struggled! I tried to get my arms free, to scratch his eyes out.

"'Release me,' I gasped, 'or I'll scream for aid.'

"'Scream yourself hoarse. At this hour no one will hear you.'

"'Oh, you brute!'

"He had pinioned my arms. I felt the pollution of those blubbery lips on my face.

"'You beast!'

"His eyes were glaring. His breath came thick. His big hand was at my throat. How terribly strong he was! I was sick with rage. Oh, how I fought!

"'You dog!'

"I was powerless. What was he doing? Suddenly he tore my dress open at the neck, and the next instant those loathsome lips were burrowing into my breast.

"'You . . . *nigger!*'

"I wrenched one hand free, and with all my force I struck him in the face. But I felt my strength leaving me. Then I screamed for aid, scream after scream.

"I heard a noise as of someone giving one huge bound on to the veranda. There was a furious shaking at the door; a pause, a great rush.

"The lock was wrenched away, the door burst open, and there white, panting, wild was . . . my beachcomber."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE IN THE BUNGALOW

1.

JACK MOON had still lingered in Papeete.

He wanted to see Felicity again, to thank her for all she had done for his mother. Vaguely he thought he might make himself known. It would be difficult to explain his sudden flight, but he could tell her the wild Odyssey of his wanderings, until at last the tide of misfortune had left him on the beach of Tahiti. Perhaps she would make some allowance for him, and think less hardly, if she thought at all.

But it was difficult. She was always in the company of that half-breed. Curse the man! She ought to be warned against him. He hated the half-breed unreasonably. Could it be that there was jealousy in his hate? He scoffed at the idea. He was concerned solely for the safety of the girl.

Still, it was very weak and foolish of him. No, he would get out, never meet her again. He would go the following day. His mind was thus fixed when that very evening he saw her with the half-breed on the balcony of the Chinese restaurant. Somehow he felt a gripping pain at his heart, coupled with a curious premonition of danger. Unable to tear himself away he watched them from a little distance.

About eight they drove off in the half-breed's car. His vague fear for the girl increased; also his vast hatred for the man. With the idea of seeing that she got back safely he loitered near her bungalow.

At nine she had not returned, but at ten he saw the light upstart in her front room. He was going away. He was rather ashamed to be prowling round her home like this.

What was the matter with him to-night? It was indeed time he left town. But if he could have only one more glimpse of her, through the palms—one little glimpse. . . .

A force was drawing him, a force stronger than himself. As he got close to the fence he saw someone in the room. It was the half-breed. Another fierce pang. This time he knew it for jealousy. He trembled with a curious excitement. It was ignoble the thing he was doing, but he could not help it. He leapt the fence and crawled through the tangle of foliage to the bungalow. Softly he raised himself up, and through the creepers around the window he stared into the room. Yes, they were there together. The sight hurt him. If it had been anyone else but that swine of a half-breed. . . . Ugh! he would crawl away as he had come.

What was happening? She was in the Tahitian's arms, but . . . she was struggling. She was striking fiercely, fighting like a wild-cat. The window was too high to leap, so he crashed through the shrubbery to the veranda. Even as he reached it he heard a scream. Another and another. He tried the door . . . locked. Then running back he hurled himself forward, and through the shattered woodwork half fell into the room.

2.

At the shock the half-breed released the girl and swung round. He stared in blank amazement, then a clean, swift blow sent him to the floor. But he was down a moment only. Quickly he gathered himself together. He was the Tahitian tiger, descended from a line of fierce warriors, and with a tiger-leap he was on his man.

The two crashed together. Locked desperately, they swayed and strained. Round the room they stumbled, knocking down everything in their way. The half-breed fought like a madman. He could not use his arms, but he kicked viciously. Then he set his teeth in his opponent's

shoulder and bit through the thin shirt. Crash! went a mirror. They reeled across the room. Smash! went a porcelain bowl. By the time they had finished nothing whole would be left in the room. A vase hurtled to the floor; a bric-a-brac table cracked and splintered. Now they tripped over a stool and both came down, the beachcomber undermost. With a swift wrench he was on his feet again, but in that instant the Tahitian had struck him on the face, and the blood streamed from it. It was the diamond ring. It had cut to the bone, laying open the cheek.

The sight of the blood seemed to rouse the Tahitian to frenzy. With a bestial howl he leapt again. But the other met his rush with a long left, clean to the face. Again the half-breed rushed; again that long left propped him off. Then the beachcomber whizzed in a right and left in swift succession, and the half-breed reeled. His own face was gory now, and there was a murderous look in his eyes. Suddenly he stooped and lifted something from the floor.

"Look out!" screamed the girl. "He's going to throw."

It was the black *poi* crusher. For the second time it whizzed through the air; but the lightning intuition which had made Moon dodge many a bullet-like blow served him once more, and the black stone crashed into a mirror. That was enough. The beachcomber had intended to spare him; now . . . an uppercut to the chin and the man lay still.

"Have you killed him?"

"No. He's all right. The cool air will revive him. I'll carry him out and leave him in the car."

He did so, returning after a few minutes. He was grimly elate. Beauregard was already coming round. Nevertheless, Moon felt he had done a good job.

However, if he had expected the girl to show gratitude he was sadly mistaken. He found her standing amid the

ruins of her dainty parlor, tears running down her cheeks. But they were tears of wrath. She turned on him.

"You wretched man! See the damage you've done."

He was aghast, miserably apologetic.

She trembled with rage. "Why did you want to interfere? Do you think I couldn't take care of myself? Look at this. . . ."

She produced a tiny pearl-handled revolver.

"He was a beast, but as a last extremity I'd have used it on him. I wish I had. Oh, you fool! Why couldn't you let me handle him my own way?"

"But I saw you struggle. I heard you scream."

"You saw, you heard—how was that?"

"I saw through the window."

"You were looking in at my window. . . . And why, pray?"

He could not answer.

"For no good purpose, I'm sure. I think you're as bad as that man out there."

Her eyes were blazing. She was humiliated that she should owe anything to this man. She despised him.

"I don't want help from you or anyone else," she stormed. "I know you're a bad lot. I carry this to protect myself from you and your like. And I warn you I can shoot. There's the door . . . go."

She began to laugh hysterically, and in a daze he went. Mechanically he wiped away the blood from his cheek. He felt a little aggrieved, and the feeling stimulated him strangely. He had no rancor against the half-revived Hyacinthe. He even cranked up the man's car. Hyacinthe drove off in much the same sort of stupor as himself. Well, better to have her think of him with hate than not think at all. A stanza in his poem came to him:

"O you who drain the cup of life, O you who wear the crown,
You never loved a woman's smile as I have loved her frown."

CHAPTER IX

THE GANG SCORES

STILL in that curious daze, he was returning home through the palm grove when again he heard a shrill scream of distress. This time, however, it seemed to come from the direction of his cabin. Swiftly he ran forward.

Something strange was going on, something sinister. Turning the corner he came in view of the doorway. Despite himself he stopped.

The girl Zelie was in the middle of the room. She was crouched on the floor, and over her stood Macara. Bad Marc had doubled his belt in his fist and was striking her vindictively.

"Ye won't come," he was saying. "Ye run after a guy as don't want ye, and ye won't come wid the man that's pinin' for ye. But I'll larn ye. There . . . and there . . ."

Swish! Swish! Each fresh blow brought a scream from Zelie, as she writhed on the floor. But somehow her screams rather suggested warning than appeals for aid. Perhaps Moon should have been more wary. Anyhow, headlong he dashed into the trap.

"Cut that out, damn you!" he blazed.

Bad Marc turned with a grin of triumph.

"Here he is, boys," he roared exultantly. "Ye've got him."

Then from the four corners of the room leapt four men. Each had a heavy club of ironwood, and whack!—they seemed to strike simultaneously. Down went Moon.

"Lambast him!" roared Macara. "Lay into him." He added his quota by kicking the fallen man viciously on the ribs. Then he turned.

"Hell! Where's the girl?"

"Blast me gizzard!" said Dirty Hank, "if the slut ain't skidooed."

He took another whack at the figure on the floor.

"Hold on, boys," said Smeet. "We don't want to do the bloke in, do we?"

"Well, if he chooses to croak accidental-like," said Bad Marc, "we ain't a-goin' ter shed no tears."

"If he ain't dead already," said Windy Bill. "Seems to me he's lyin' suspicious quiet."

"Foxin' most likely," said Macara. "Water's the best thing to bring him round. Let's dump him over the dock."

The coaling-dock was only a few hundred yards away. The street was dark and still, and there was no one to see the five men as they bore their limp victim. Nevertheless, they went quickly and in silence. A sense of the enormity of what they were about to do had come over them. They were panting when they arrived at the water, and rested their burden on the edge of the wharf.

"It's deep an' dark down there," said Macara hoarsely. "Slip him in, lads."

But Smeet and Windy stood aside. It was Gunsburg and Hank who dropped the body into the black water.

"What d'ye see?" said Windy, peering down, and his face was like chalk.

"Nawthin'," whispered Smeet. "But I seed a big shark nosin' round the piles this mawnin'."

"He'll make elegant shark-feed," said Macara. "What's that?"

A shrill whistle pierced the night.

"The cops! Scatter."

Like rats the beachcombers scuttled into the shadows. They had no fear of one another, but they dreaded the law as represented by a young American, who held the

post of chief of police. Sturgis he was called, a war veteran with a rare reputation for stark courage. Now he came running, accompanied by Zelie.

"What 'thell's this? What you boys after? Huh! They're gone, the sons of b——s. What's thet? Hear something?"

Zelie was leaning far over the dark water. With the wonderful sight of the native, she could see where he could not.

"Are you there?" she wailed.

"Yes, but . . . I'm hanging to the piles . . . all in . . . strength going . . . you'll have to be quick. . . ."

Zelie slipped into the milkwarm lagoon. She swam like a fish, and her arms were around him, supporting him.

"Hurry!" she cried to the policeman. "Get help. He's sinking."

After what seemed an age Sturgis returned with the watchman of the wharf. They lowered a rope. Zelie hitched it under the arms of the exhausted man, and the other two pulled him out. She and the policeman half-carried him to his cabin. He was a mass of bruises, but no bones seemed to be broken.

"You're all right," said Sturgis. "Don't hang round town any longer than you can help, though. Better pull out. Once you get that gang down on you it's unhealthy. There ain't no law on the beach. You might disappear, and no one would look for you. You might be found with your head bashed in, and no one would say it wasn't an accident. I tell you again, better get out."

Moon understood and promised faintly. All he craved just then was to be left alone. He wanted to crawl away like a dog, let nature heal his hurt. When Zelie begged leave to wait and watch, he shook his head.

"No, no. Come in the morning," he groaned.

But when she came he had already gone.

CHAPTER X

THE TRAP

1.

FELICITY ARDEN was disgusted with Papeete. She wanted to leave at once. Alas! she must wait another week for the boat. She was a prisoner.

But she looked at the beauty about her, took heart, became merry again. Once more she was in love with her prison. True, she did not want any more adventures like the last, yet in a way it was funny. How she would shock Coombs when he came. That Jack Moon, poor devil! She certainly had pitched into him. She felt a bit sorry now. Perhaps she should have offered him money. What a fighter the man was!

And Hyacinthe! Hum! There she must be careful. He was capable of being ugly. And on this wild, romantic isle anything might happen.

So she continued to absorb atmosphere, made color sketches, went for long walks, and on her return wrote up her journal. Here are some of her notes:

"Men clad only in scarlet *pareus* stalk majestically amid the palms. Their amber-brown torsos are magnificently developed. They have sloe-black hair, teeth white as the curd of the cocoanut, and friendly, smiling eyes. On the veranda of each cottage squats the family. The great golden legs of the women are bare, their white cotton dresses tucked between their thighs. Stark babies sprawl on the mats, and nude children pause in their play to stare at me. Everywhere is the same wealth of palm and plantain, of taro and bread-fruit. In green

glades, by huts of thatch and bamboo, golden forms are charmingly grouped.

"All seems idyllic. Richness of color leaps on me, making me breathless. On a flamboyant tree with ferny leaves and elephant-hued limbs a bougainvillæa vine is trailing, and its glowing violet contrasts with the light fantastic flame of the flamboyant. What delight for a painter, and what despair! . . .

"Three proud palms stencil themselves against the opal of the evening sky. Their slim stems are inky black, inky black, too, their tufted tops. Every frond of their feathery leaves is needle clear. These leaves move softly, like feelers of insects, with a voluptuous motion. Birds fly up into their hearts, twitter a little, are silent. Peace deepens. The pearly light passes out of the sky, and the palms dim themselves against the freshly awakened stars. . . .

"Between Moorea and the mainland is a glow of daffodil. The sea is like a lake of yellow wine. In its lustrous peace poise two canoes, black silhouettes pasted on a background of golden alabaster. Each canoe is clear-cut as a knife. The fisherman is like a tiny figure carved in jade. As if he realizes the harmony of the picture, he drifts in silence on a sea of dream. . . .

"Alas! and alas! Poor dauber that I am, plastering my crude colors on a bit of coarse canvas!"

2.

One day she conceived a brilliant idea. She would tramp around the island. Why not? The Stevensons had done it—barefoot. She would go shod, with two boys and a pack-pony. Unconventional? Well, what was the good of being deliciously rich if one couldn't afford to

defy opinion? Dangerous? She could not see it in that way. No, it would give her a final saturation of local color. And besides—it would be no end of fun.

The morning she started was spacious and resplendent; but then all Tahiti mornings are. In the market was a riot of chaffering over bronze bunches of *feis* and silver strings of fish. At the bare table of a Chinaman she made a breakfast of butterless bread and scalding coffee.

She hired a ramshackle Ford to go as far as Papeno, where she would begin her tramp. Her driver was a fat native, clad only in a singlet and dungaree pants. With the thick soles of his naked feet he manipulated the pedals and urged his old car till its protests were vehement.

It was six o'clock only, but the sun, gathering strength, lapped up the heavy dew. Already life was astir. In the dust of the high road they disturbed a pitched battle of mina birds. Pigs gorged on the mangoes fallen overnight. From the porches of the wooden shanties half-awake natives stretched and stared at them.

At the mouth of the Faatuo Valley she halted the car so that she could get a glimpse of the Diadem. She did not like her driver. He was surly, and spoke to her with a cigarette hanging from his lip. She was almost inclined to tell him to take her back to town.

She walked a few hundred yards up the valley. The hills rose in velvety undulations till at last in a green wedge they seemed to grip the mountain. Austere and virgin it stood against the sky, superb in isolation. A wisp of silver mist wreathed its front. It was like a god crowned with hibiscus blossoms and proud that its fortressed heights had never been scaled by man.

As she came in sight of the car again she saw another drawn up beside it. The two drivers were in close conversation, but when she approached the strange car drove

off swiftly. Something familiar about it struck her. "Who is that?" she demanded sharply.

"Him Monsieur Beauregard. Him big plantation Papeno way."

So she was driving right into the country of the enemy. Well, once embarked on the adventure she would never turn back.

But any fear was soon driven from her mind. Suddenly her eyes were refreshed by the sight of the open sea. It was churning on a curve of black sand, and a band of natives were pulling in their net. They were laughing, singing, garlanded with flowers. All the village had turned out. Soon they would feast on the fish. What a jolly life!

3.

Unceasing groves of greenery. Through the fawn-gray slenderness of palms the silver dazzle of the sea. A high bluff where the soil was red, and the road was like the bed of a mountain stream. Here one of the tires popped.

While the driver was fitting a fresh inner tube a white man came up and offered her a mango. His thick bristle of gray beard was dyed a canary color by one he had recently devoured. He addressed her:

"Just look at that road. There's French colonization for you. No money spent on repairs, all going into the pockets of fat *bureaucrats*. Taxing us a hundred per cent. Poor Tahiti. What's going to become of us? If only America would take it over. . . . Look out! that mango's getting out of control. You'll get your frock stained."

"Yes, I know," she laughed. "I shouldn't have tackled it without a bathing suit on. You don't eat mangoes. You plunge into them and swim around."

Soon they were able to go on, and she bade the mango

man a friendly farewell. The way grew wilder. The beaches looped and curved below them. The line of the reef was like an ivory bow, the lagoon a pavement of coruscating gems, the palms a plateau of green jade. The hills creased in orange and emerald, and the mountains soared to heights of violet.

Then at a most desolate part of the road something again went wrong with the car. This time, however, it seemed to be the motor, and the native stood staring at it, scratching his head. Telling him he could catch up with her, she walked on.

There was no barrier reef now, no still lagoon. The full force of the sea crashed on barren rocks. It burst through blow-holes with deafening reports and clouds of spume. The rocks streamed whitely, and over them black, long-legged crabs raced like giant spiders. The coral road ran upward along the front of precipitous bluffs, then down in the shadow of overhanging precipices. By the wayside grew great masses of the sensitive plant, that crinkled up at her approach.

She hesitated and looked back. Was the car never coming? She was beginning to be a little alarmed. The way was now truly wild and desolate. Great ferns covered the face of the cliff, and waters dripped and trickled. No more palms, only the ironwood with its rusty trunk and fringelike leaves. No more natives, only dreary, tern-haunted solitude.

That fool of a chauffeur! What was the matter with him? Full of anxiety she hastened back to where she had left him. Ah! there was the car anyway. She hurried to it. Then just as she reached it she saw that it was not her car at all, but a finer one. And grinning at her over the driving wheel was the swarthy face of Hyacinthe Beauregard.

CHAPTER XI

THE PURSUIT

1.

"ARE you looking for your car?" asked the half-breed suavely.

A haughty stare.

"Because you need not. It's gone on to Papeete."

"But . . . why?"

"I sent it."

"You did not dare. . . ."

"'Dare' is my middle name here. You are in my country now. I'm lord and master in these parts. You've treated me badly, but I'm going to forgive you. Come up and let me drive you back."

"I'd rather walk every step of the way."

"Oh, I did not mean to drive you back to Papeete. I meant as far as my boat. Our unofficial honeymoon is coming off after all. Everything is prepared. My men only wait the order to sail."

"You devil!"

She gave a rapid look round then started to run in the direction of Papeete. Going on his lowest gear he followed her cynically.

"You'll just tire yourself out," he shouted; "and there are two of my fellows ahead."

Sure enough she saw two semi-naked figures standing on the road. Was there no way of escape? Beauregard in the car was only a hundred yards behind; his men about the same distance in front. To her right was the

sea, to her left a steep, rocky ravine. A little stream ran down, and alongside was a tiny pig-path. She darted up this, and got about fifty yards before they gave chase.

She could hear them gaining on her rapidly; so she wormed her way into the bush and hugged the ground. She saw them run past her hiding-place, hurrying up-stream after her. The half-breed was cursing his folly in not securing her when he had the chance. Only one native was with him, so that he must have left the other to guard the mouth of the stream.

As soon as she could neither see nor hear them she bore off to the right through the bush. The going was terribly hard, but she struggled on for about half a mile till she came to another stream. It was bigger than the first. There were good-sized pools and the water had an opal tint, like soapy water. In the depths were giant black shrimps. The rocks were covered with russet-colored lizards, and mosquitoes rose in clouds. How fortunate there were no snakes. Painfully, stumbling over boulders and splashing through pools, she made her way down-stream, and at last to her great joy she heard the sound of the surf on the beach.

Cautiously she peered out. No one. The way was clear. Of course they were still watching the other stream mouth, expecting she must come down at last. They would never think she could make her way through that bush. She could scarcely believe it herself, but, as she looked at her rent and tattered clothes and felt the bruises on her body, she realized that the jungle had taken its toll. Once more she sped along the road.

With what joy she came to a little village! She made herself as presentable as possible. She was hungry, primitively hungry. Hurrah! there was a Chinese store. But the old Chinaman at the door did not even raise his

eyes from the Confucius or something he was reading. Had he bread? He waved a comprehensive hand to his shelves, and resumed his literature.

The shelves were not encouraging; cans of sardines and salmon; corned-beef and carnation milk; bolts of calico, piles of *pareus;* Camel cigarettes . . . but of bread or biscuit never a trace. Despairingly she pointed to some sacks of flour, and the Chinaman looked up in a pained way. He pointed down the road, nodding vigorously. This seemed to mean that at the establishment of his hated rival she would doubtless find what she wanted. Alas again! No signs of hated rival. A wily Celestial ruse to get rid of her.

On she went, hoping against hope. No more native huts, no banana groves, not even a spreading mango-tree. There was a bread-fruit one though.

It seemed ironical to seek for bread and find only bread-fruit. She managed to dislodge one of the green globes and bisect it, but the interior was like a fungus. Better, she thought, to die of hunger than be poisoned by unripe fruit. In her extremity she called on the gods, and even as she called one stepped from the wildwood to her aid.

He was a very stalwart and comely god, a smiling, kindly god, with a golden skin and a wreath of flowers around his head. His only clothing was a scarlet *pareu.* He held out his hand and spoke in excellent French.

"I saw you coming a long way off, and I have been preparing to welcome you. Lunch is waiting. It is useless to go further, as you will find no habitation for many miles. Do me the honor to be my guest."

She stared bewilderedly. Were her distracted nerves playing her tricks, or did she hear aright? But, no,

nothing could be more gracious than his eager hospitality, so joyfully she followed him.

There in a green glade she sat down to eat. Her table was the ground, broad banana leaves her tablecloth. She drank the clear nectar of a green cocoanut, while he served her with steaming bread-fruit, *feis* and *poi*. Then from a pot he pulled a young lobster, split it in two with his machete, and set it smoking before her.

Yes, indeed, that was a feast. And when she hinted about payment he drew himself up proudly. That would have spoiled everything. Recognizing in him one of nature's gentlemen she shook him warmly by the hand and went on her way.

She was feeling cheerful again. Her adventure was over. After all, she was inclined to look on it as a bit of sport, something to write about in her journal. She must be only some twenty kilometers distant from Papeete. If need be she could walk in.

Suddenly above the roaring of the reef she heard the roar of a furiously driven car. What filthy luck! It was Beauregard and his two natives, and they had seen her. There was no time to lose. Swiftly she looked about her. In front the road swept round a high, wooded point. No escape there. Again she dashed into the cover and made her way up the hillside. She heard the half-breed jam on his brakes. Once more they were on her trail. Sick with fear now, she stumbled on. Then she came to a halt and cowered by the vast root of a banyan-tree. They were so close she was afraid they would hear her if she moved another step. They were beating the cover, advancing with systematic vigilance. She could hear the half-breed hoarsely directing them.

Crouching there she did not notice that the sky had darkened. Almost imperceptibly it had changed from

pale-blue to purple-gray. Now, without warning, the torrent descended. It beat the broad leaves of the giant taro with silvery violence, it streamed down the green panels of the plantains, it blurred a *purau* only a few feet away. Best of all it drowned every sound of pursuit. Oh, how she welcomed that fierce, kindly deluge! It was, indeed, a friend in need.

They could not hear her now, so on she ran again, and soon to her joy she came to a tiny path such as *fei* gatherers use to make their way up and down. She had to stoop and often to squeeze herself through the dense verdure; but trail there undoubtedly was, and it led somewhere. After a while it broadened, and at last high on the brow of the long hill it came out on a clearing.

Someone had burnt away the vegetation. The ground was still brown and bare, though the fresh green was beginning to prick through. On its edge she hesitated. Would she be seen crossing this exposed patch? It led over the shoulder of the hill and doubtless dipped to a valley that sloped to the sea. The rain had ceased as suddenly as it had come on, and the sun was cheerfully asserting itself. It must be late though, close on four o'clock. The idea of being overtaken by darkness terrified her, and she made for the open.

2.

The half-breed was having difficulty in keeping his beaters up to their job. Tahitian seamen, they hated the forest, feared it even. Then the rain came down, damping still more their ardor. However, rum revived it, a bottle between them. He had a second bottle from which he swigged strenuously.

Bidding them continue their search in either direction,

he climbed a cocoanut palm, and scanned the expanse of verdure. He was just as well up there as anywhere, for with his trained eye he could see the faintest movement or shadow in the green tapestry. So sitting amid the brown nuts in the heart of the tree he kept a keen, confident eye all about him. Suddenly, as he tilted the bottle to swig more rum, he saw a little gray figure climbing the brown patch at the summit of the hill.

His victim. In a moment he was down and off in pursuit. He too stumbled on the little path and tore along it, mad with rage and rum. This time she should not escape him. He ground his teeth viciously, cursing at the branches that barred his way. He even struck at them with his clenched fist as he panted upwards.

The girl had gained the shoulder of the hill and was descending on the other side. It was bare for a little space, but soon the bush began again. Then as she hesitated which way to take, her heart gave a great bound of joy. She saw smoke rising from the valley below her. Now she could make out tiny huts tucked away in the greenwood. A settlement. Thank God! she was saved.

Hesitating no longer, she broke into the bush by the nearest gap. There had been a barbed wire, but a fallen tree had leveled it. It caught at her skirt.

She was struggling frantically to free herself when she happened to look up. A scream of fear burst from her. There on the crest of the hill loomed the form of the half-breed. His tall figure was outlined against the sky, his chest was heaving, his eyes blazed with passion.

Then he saw her, and with a cry of triumph he swooped down.

CHAPTER XII

THE VALLEY OF THE LIVING DEAD

WOULD she never reach the settlement?

The brush thinned out to a cultivated hill-slope rich with bread-fruit trees. The ground was orbed with the gold of fallen mangoes, banana palms gleamed luminously against the gloom of orange groves. Even in her panic a sense of the valley's beauty came to her. It was a dream valley, shut off from the world, full of peace and innocent joyousness. Grassy hills girdled it round. A crystal stream rippled joyously through it; and all along its banks, nestling amid the greenery, were dainty huts of thatch and bamboo. Surely she should find help there.

But it was strange. The huts were silent; nay, the whole valley was silent—steeped, it seemed, in a sunny calm, an idyllic content.

And into this profound calm suddenly burst the infuriated figure of her pursuer. As she ran down the little path that bordered the stream, he cut off her flight. At one leap he took the water, and with a shout of triumph he had seized her, drawn her close. She fought fiercely, but in those straining arms she was powerless as a child. The man was mad with passion. There was a gloating joy in his eyes, and the wild lust of an animal in his distorted face. From the corners of his gaping mouth the saliva drooled. . . . Would no one come to her aid? Did no one live in this lonely valley? Were these huts all tenantless? . . .

He had thrown her to the ground and was glaring down on her. She felt his hot breath on her face. She struck at him, but he seized her arm, twisting it savagely. In her fear and pain she screamed as she had never known she could scream, screamed as if to awake the dead.

And something had awakened at her cry. The silent valley had awakened. Curtains of *tappa* were lifting, screens of fiber being pushed aside. Faces were peering forth, but what faces! Never had human imagination conceived such horror. They were not faces even—they were *masks*.

And now from the doorways forms were slinking, like lost souls roused from distressful dreams. They were coming into the sunshine to blink and gibber and paw. The little huts spewed them forth to the merciless light, revealing them in all their hideousness. Surely they were not human! Surely . . . then the terrible truth flashed upon her. She had awakened the Valley of the Living Dead. The lepers were upon them.

Suddenly the half-breed looked up. His face blanched with panic. He should have known the settlement was so near, but rum and passion had blinded him. Now he understood only too well. Ringing them round in ever-increasing numbers he saw emaciated men with fingerless hands and handless arms, women with faces hideous as gargoyles, children. . . . Ugh! Masks were all about them, masks of horror and despair.

He started to his feet. The girl was still cowering on the ground. The grotesque and livid faces grew denser about them. The maimed, distorted forms hemmed them in. The silence was like a wire drawn out to breaking-point. . . .

All at once a thin-edged voice seemed to fret that silence. The girl looked up with starting eyes. A tall man, meager

as a skeleton, was gazing down on her. He leaned on a crutch, and one leg below the knee ended in a silvered stump. He had a livid face, twisted fantastically awry. As she looked he fumbled at something in his rags, a small glittering object, which with trembling hand he jammed into a scabrous eye-slit. It was a monocle. Then to her amazement he spoke in English, and his accent was the accent of Oxford.

"Can it be that I hear the cry of a damozel in distress?"

His voice was incisively mocking, his manner had the finicky elegance of a Beau Brummel. She stared but could not speak.

"Unhand her, villain!" said the Man with the Monocle. "Desist, or . . ." He made a step towards the half-breed, who recoiled. Beauregard's hair seemed to stand on end. He gave a hoarse cry of loathing. Instinctively he raised his hand to strike at this—Thing.

"Now, don't be naughty," piped the grotesque one. "Don't be peevish or—I'll slap you."

Again he made a forward step. Again the half-breed recoiled. He almost touched a child who was peering up at him with a distorted leer. He shuddered, trembled from head to foot.

A curiously devilish grin came across the face of the Man with the Monocle, like the grin on the face of a skull. But his manner was mincing and dainty.

"A lady, too. And you would outrage her, you black son of Satan. Well, we have the wherewithal to cool your lust. Susannah!"

A woman pushed through the throng. Her face was like a huge tumor. Her eyes were blotted out, her mouth a black gap. Two hideous holes replaced her nose, and her neck was swollen as if with goitre.

"Susannah! I have found a husband for you at last. Behold. . . ."

The lepers laughed, a strange hollow mockery of laughter. With livid smiles they crowded round the two.

"Susannah," piped the man with the eyeglass, "is a *chef d'œuvre*, conceived by our Master of the Macabre. The belle of our happy valley. Her virginity is guaranteed. Take her, my boy, and be happy."

Then he said something in Tahitian, and once again that weird, cavernous laughter rumbled forth. A score of hands were laid on the half-breed. He fought like a maniac, but he could do nothing against so many. Susannah led the way to her cabin, and, shrieking with terror, he was borne after her.

"Let us leave the happy couple alone," said the grotesque man. "Decency forbids us to follow them farther. And now, lady, come and I will show you the way out of our idyllic retreat. Do not touch anything, though, nor let anything touch you. . . . There! Keep straight down the valley. Yonder you will find the path that leads to the road. On either side are our rival churches, which we patronize without sectarian prejudice. Religion is our sole distraction."

He screwed his monocle tighter in the swollen socket of his only eye, and looked at her quizzically.

"Do not forget the Valley of the Living Dead. Wars and revolutions mean nothing to us here, but the gift of a case of milk, or a box of jam, that is an event of national importance."

"Who are you?" she asked, her voice pitiful.

"A leper," he said airily. "One who has already dug his own grave and waits to fill it. Who *was* I? . . ." He shrugged his shoulders, then went on drawlingly: "That doesn't matter. In Piccadilly many knew me once. Fair

ladies, God bless 'em, have loved me. But of the man I was *this* is all that remains."

He took the glittering monocle from his eye and dangled it foppishly.

"Nothing left but an eyeglass!"

"Can I do nothing for you? Your friends? . . ."

He shook his head. There was something bitterly brilliant in his smile. He tapped the breast of his tattered tunic with the glittering object.

"No," he said jauntily. Then he drawled: "I'm dead, you see . . . officially dead. . . . Good-by. . . ."

He finished in the same mocking voice, and his gray form melted in the growing shadow.

Still wondering if she were not in the grip of some hideous nightmare she hurried through the gate. But she had not gone more than a few paces when she realized that it was out of the frying-pan into the fire. Two big Tahitian sailors were barring the road. She had a momentary hope that they would let her pass, but they closed on her, and in another moment she was struggling in their arms.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRECK

1.

ALL morning Jack Moon had been wondering about the little coasting-boat that had anchored in the bay to the left of his hut. Launching his leaky pirogue, he paddled round it, but all he could see was a savage-looking native stretched on deck beside a rum bottle. All he could learn, too, by the said empty rum bottle soaring over his head and an irate warning to sheer off, was that his curiosity was unwelcome. So he continued to drift about the lagoon, keeping an eye on the strange craft.

He had taken up his abode in a little palm-leaf hut just above the beach. He disturbed no one, and no one disturbed him. The natives were accustomed to strange white men squatting near them. As a rule these squatters were no good—rum-hogs and debauchees of women, but this one seemed harmless enough. A fine-looking man, too, muscular as one of themselves. Indeed, as the days went on and his skin became amber-brown, he might well have passed for a Tahitian.

Often clad only in a *pareu*, he would stand erect at the bow of his pirogue as splendid as a figure cast in bronze. He seemed to be suspended in the air, for the lagoon was so crystal clear it was hard to tell where the air left off and the water began. Below, as in a lens, he could see the gardens of coral, the cruel coral, of every unimaginable shape and color. Rainbow-hued fishes darted harlequin-like amid its groves and grottos, sported and chased amid its myriad blooms. There were fishes of cornflower blue, of glittering silver, of gleaming copper; zebra-striped

fishes, leopard-spotted fishes. He never tired of looking through this crystal lens to the wonders of that teeming and gorgeous world, the bottom of the lagoon.

About noon he paddled back to the hut and cooked a fish he had speared. This with some bananas made his midday meal. After which he dozed a little.

He had inherited his hut from a fellow white. He had been tramping along the road when a voice hailed him in good American.

"Hey, bo! Where ye headin' for?"

The man looked like a low-type native. He wore a dirty, armless singlet and chopped-off overalls. His legs were covered with yaws, partly cured.

"I gotta hut over there on the point," he said. "Rented a bit of land and expected to get a grub-stake out of it when this 'fay-fay' got me. Both legs swelled. I didn't know how to doctor myself, so I laid up, and a *vahine* brought me my eats. It went away, but I'm scared it'll come back. Guess I'll have to get out. I hate to do that. This climate's cured me of chest trouble. Hell, isn't it? You go to a warm country because you're a lunger, then you gotta go back to a cold one to be cured of 'fay-fay.' I like it fine out here. I know too well what it's like job-hunting in the States. Life here's a picnic. But 'fay-fay!' . . . I can't stand that. Guess I'll pull out."

And now he was gone, and Jack Moon was the tenant of the cabin on the point.

2.

It was dusk when he again launched the canoe; it was starlight when he softly paddled around the strange boat. No sign even of the truculent bottle-thrower. The man must have gone ashore. He let his canoe drift in, and, raising himself, peered about the empty deck. Then he leapt lightly up. A mere impulse this. It seemed so good

to tread a deck once again, even if it were only that of a cockroach-cluttered coaster. He walked aft, thinking that there might be someone in the dark cubby-hole of a cabin. No one. Well, he would get back.

Then he saw that his canoe had drifted away. That was a nuisance. Nothing now but to drop into the water and swim after it. He was lowering himself over the side when suddenly he remembered . . . his automatic. It was in his hip pocket. Ever since his last encounter with Macara's gang he had never been without it. He must keep his pistol dry. No, he would wait quietly till the crew came back, tell them he had just come to pay a friendly call, and ask them to go after his canoe. If they were saucy, well, he could lick the lot.

They were coming now. He could hear voices on the beach and a pirogue putting off. Through the starlight he could see it, a dark blotch on the water. Then, all at once, he seemed to hear the smothered cries of a woman. His eyes strained through the gloom. Yes, a struggle was going on; the pirogue was rocking violently. Again he heard a woman's gasping cries, the guttural oaths of a man. What dirty work was this? He backed down the tiny hatch into the black cabin. There, drawing into the farthest corner, he waited.

Now they were hoisting someone on deck, having trouble about it, too. They were dragging a body along, lowering it into the cabin beside him. By reaching out his hand he could touch a dark, soft form. What the devil were these fellows after?

And, in truth, they were in somewhat of a quandary. There was the woman, but where was the boss? It was not the first girl he had abducted and taken to the atoll; but he had always accompanied them. Now the native captain was in a blue funk. Three courses were open to him—to put the girl ashore again; to hang on till morning

on the chance of Beauregard coming; or, lastly, to make a night run to the atoll. By this favoring wind he might do it in ten hours. He could leave the girl there and return the same day for his master.

This plan appealed to him as being safest. The sooner they got away the better. After all, they held the girl—that was the main thing. So in a few minutes they had the anchor up, hoisted the mainsail, and were heading for the opening in the reef.

Huddled in his corner, Moon scarcely dared to breathe. If they heard him they could shoot him like a rat in a trap. He could never get out of that hole alive. He heard the ripple of waves against the sides, then the wash of heavier waves. They were past the reef now and standing out to sea. He cursed the impulse that had made him embark on this adventure. Well, he would see it through; and if this woman, whoever she was, needed his help, he would help her.

Who was she? Stealthily he put out his hand and felt the sole of a shoe. Delicately he touched the uppers. They were low shoes with low heels, and they fastened with three buckles. Wherever had he seen shoes like that? Then with a heart-leap he remembered. *She* had worn shoes like that the day she was painting on the beach. This would be Beauregard's boat. He remembered now he had remarked it in Papeete harbor. Well, well . . .

A plan. He must think quickly. The girl was half unconscious. Thank God for that. If she heard him move in the dark she would surely scream, and he would be discovered. He must get out without her knowing. Ever so cautiously he stepped over her.

The captain was steering. He was a big, hulking Raratongan, and to-night he was only half sober. One bare foot gripped the tiller, his eyes were fixed on the stars. One eye, that is to say. The other was of glass, the original having been gouged out by a Solomon Islander. Like

a shadow at his feet Moon crouched in the narrow hatchway.

Suddenly the captain looked down. He was staring into a fierce, bearded face and the wicked muzzle of an automatic. He understood the argument. Up went his hands. Silently the bearded man reached behind him and took from his hip pocket a heavy revolver, then catlike backed away.

"Now," roared Moon, "I'm master of this boat, and if you don't obey my orders" . . . Bang!

He fired at the captain, who had groped for a hatchet that lay in the stern locker.

"Quit that! Next time I'll shoot to hurt. Do what I tell you and no harm will be done."

"What hell we do?" growled the captain, nursing a bloody hand.

"Make for Moorea and land us there, myself and that woman."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. Damn glad get rid of you both."

The sailors were too frightened to be dangerous. One was an old man, inexhaustibly good natured; the other a lumpish youth, infinitely stupid. Moon knew he had nothing to fear from them, so he gave the captain his undivided attention.

That worthy accepted the situation. He asked leave to smoke, and, pipe in mouth, philosophically held a course for Moorea.

3.

The moon rose after a bit. It was a bonny night, and they bowled along merrily.

"You can land us on the nearest beach, Captain," said Moon, and the captain grunted.

In the moonlight the sail was a silver sheet, the deck bathed in silver glamor, silver the sea that swept suavely

past. Even the merry cockroaches were silver. The boat made a clean picture of light and shadow. The two Tahitians were perched in the peak, Moon sat amidships, with a weapon in either grip. The one-eyed captain stood with his huge foot on the tiller, his huge hand on the hauling rope of the mainsail. From the dark of the little cabin sobs of fear punctuated long spells of silence.

. . . The hours went past. The mountains of Tahiti dimmed and vanished, the hills of Moorea loomed up more blackly against the moonlit sky. Already they could see its fantastic outline, and in this enchanted night they seemed to be slipping through a fairy sea to an isle of mystery.

. . . Another hour passed. Now they could distinguish the shore, hear the boom of the surf. The captain's face grew grim. With gathering speed the breeze was bowling them on—on to that barrier of perilous foam. In the moonlight the reef was roaring its menace, showing its teeth like an angry beast. From under a bushy eyebrow the seeing eye of the captain gleamed anxiously.

"You know your way in?" demanded Moon.

"Me know one place plenty close. Me not sure."

"Maybe you'd better stand off a bit."

They tacked away and skirted the reef, all eyes seeking a break in the moonlit foam. Then one of the Tahitians shouted, pointed, and the Raratongan made for a gap of low water.

The roar was deafening now. They were lifted on the swell of great combers that crashed on the coral.

The Raratongan grunted: "I think I make it. Not so sure. Maybe you get lady on deck."

Moon lowered himself into the dark hole, and bent over the soft form huddled on the floor. She was quite still; but when he touched her she started and shrank with terror.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered. "I'm a friend. Nothing's going to harm you. Come on deck. We're going to land in a few minutes."

Though she could not see him, something in his tone reassured her. Struggling to her feet she let him support her to the deck. The men had lowered the sail, and the boat was heading for the reef.

"You see the gap?" shouted Moon.

The Raratongan's teeth gritted.

"Maybe make mistake. Him reef low only. Maybe wave take us over."

In the clear moonlight they could discern a space where the great rollers smothered the reef in a welter of foam. It was too late to draw back and there was just a chance they could scrape past at this point. The two sailors had put out sweeps and frantically back-watered. The captain looked over his shoulder at the oncoming combers. They seemed big as a house.

"Hold her back, boys."

Here was a huge one. Now for it. . . .

The little boat seemed to rise high on that long smooth ridge of black water, then poise for a moment as if in fear. In that brief pause they could see silver-streaming below them the shelf of the coral. Down they plunged in a cataract of roaring foam. Would they get through? There was a crash that flung them off their feet, hideous grinding, then the boat swung round and heeled over at the mercy of the surf.

"Struck!" groaned Moon. "She's finished." Then he roared above the tumult: "Save yourselves."

The two Tahitians, each grasping a sweep, had leaped into the boiling surf. They were stumbling knee-deep in spume over the jagged coral when the next big comber crashed down on them and they disappeared. The captain had wrenched off the hatch of the hold and launched it

overside, but that mighty wave caught him, and he too was swept from the deck.

Moon saw coming that glassy wall of water. With one arm round the girl he grabbed a ring-bolt and braced himself. As the great wave smashed down on them he felt the ring-bolt torn from his grasp. They were thrown violently against the stern-rail. Beneath them once more streamed the cruel coral.

"Jump," he cried, "before the next one."

They leapt; but the girl lay where she alighted, and he snatched her up in his arms. He was waist deep in the receding water; the coral was cutting open his bare feet, tearing at his flesh. On he staggered.

Now came the next wave. It lifted him clean off his feet, rolled him over and flung him on the jagged fangs of the coral. He was stunned and bleeding, but the girl was safe in his arms. On he stumbled once more. Again the incoming breaker caught him and rolled him over, but this time there was no lacerating coral under his feet. The wave had swept them into the deep lagoon.

He was treading water. The girl was unconscious in his arms, and her face gleamed white in the moonlight. Suddenly his foot touched a knob of coral, and he balanced himself on it. He looked round. The water was still. Yonder glimmered the beach. Ah! if he could only gain it. But he was weak and dazed, and the girl was a dead weight. Dared he push off to make the shore? He might sink in the deeper water beyond.

As he hesitated, something drifted close to him. It was the hatch the captain had launched. He caught it. It sank a little, but supported them well enough.

So letting the girl's head rest on his shoulder he launched out. Half an hour later he staggered up a beach of silver sand and fell with his burden under the soft shadow of a sea-leaning palm.

BOOK III.—THE ISLE OF MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

THE CASTAWAYS

1.

JACK MOON awoke with a start.

Surely he must be dreaming. The wreck on the moonlit reef—was it a hideous nightmare? Where was the girl? Ah! she was lying where he had left her, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. Her head rested on the ragged gray root of a palm; her thick, yellow-brown hair pillowed her pale cheek; her position was cramped, uneasy—but she slept, slept.

Yes, it was all like a dream, and so dreamlike in its peace and beauty that he blinked bewildered at the laughing sun, rubbing his eyes like a child. The lagoon smiled at him. It shimmered opalescently to the reef. Its coral floor was like mosaic. It was mirror smooth, but on the strand it tinkled with a lisp and lapse of baby waves. He watched these wavelets as they wimpled in, to somersault tunefully amid the coral.

The beach curved like a crescent moon. Cocoanut palms crowded close to it as if they loved to glass themselves in the lagoon. The tiny crystal waves washed the ragged gray fiber of their roots. Sometimes a nut splashed into the water. Cocoanuts, indeed, floated everywhere. They rolled in the ripple, and piled their ragged brown husks on the sand.

He gazed out to the reef. A league-long line of foam. No sign of the cutter. She must have broken up or drifted off again. Where was the crew? At the bottom of the

lagoon, maybe. Yes, it was all unreal. He could not believe it had happened. Yet there was the girl. Or was she there? No! . . . She, too, had vanished.

In the midst of his bewilderment he spied her again. She was yonder on the beach, running away from him. He must overtake her, reassure her.

Backing up against a palm she faced him. Her expression was desperate, and she swung a spar of driftwood.

"Don't dare to touch me!" she cried. "I'll defend myself to the death."

He stared at her, hardly understanding.

"But," he said at last, "I don't mean any harm. All I want is to protect you."

"Then why did you abduct me?"

"I?"

"Yes, you are one of them. Where are the others?"

"Food for the fishes, I guess. But I know nothing of them. Let me explain. . . ."

He tried to tell her, and she listened, partially assured. Suddenly a light of recognition leapt into her eyes.

"Why, you are Jack Moon, are you not?"

"Yes."

She held out her hands, dropping her weapon of defense.

"I trust you. I was horrid to you last time we met. Can you forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive. I'd do anything for you."

"Would you? You're . . . awfully nice. I say—I'm in a dreadful mess. I might at least put my hair up."

"No, please leave it down. It's more in the picture."

"Yes, 'movie' picture. I look like one of those actresses in a South Sea film. See! I've lost a shoe, and running over coral hasn't improved my silk stocking. I might as well go bare-footed, like you. Oh, I wonder if you couldn't rustle something to eat. I'm amazingly hungry."

"It may be difficult perhaps."

"Difficult! I thought in the South Seas one had just to reach up and pick fruit from the trees."

"Yes, but the trees round here don't seem to be the right sort."

"Never mind. I wouldn't turn up my delicately chiseled nose at a bit of cocoanut at this moment. Can't you crack one?"

He broke open a ripe nut, and they walked along, nibbling at the white rind.

"Isn't that simply gorgeous!" she cried, pointing to the prismatic shimmer of the lagoon. "It's typical. The South Seas in a nut-shell—a cocoanut shell. Quite romantic, too, like a scene from a novel. Outcasts . . . a palm-fringed strand. . . . Pity it wasn't a coral island, instead of a volcanic one. A lonely atoll somewhere, with a hint of cannibals in the distance. You a sporting British Baronet in disgrace. You're not, are you?"

He could not understand her flippancy. There was something strained, unnatural about it. Perhaps it was the reaction. He answered soberly enough:

"No, I'm only a poor man."

She gave him a quick, appraising look. He was a joy to her artist's eye. But physique wasn't everything, and he certainly was rough. After all, she'd better not be too friendly. But, then, he had saved her life. How should one treat the man who saves one's life? Having never been in the position before, she lacked experience. She pondered over it. If she had saved anyone's life she would feel irritated. She would almost dislike the person. She would cut short their protestations of gratitude and hurry away.

On the other hand, having one's own life saved was even more annoying. Of course she ought to feel absurdly

grateful (and she did), but she hated to show it. She usually hid her finest feelings by an easy flippancy. Yes, the situation was embarrassing. This beachcomber had a huge claim on her gratitude. She could not acknowledge it as it deserved, and she could not ignore it. By-and-by he would be suitably rewarded. She would set him up for life, or settle on him a yearly income. In the meantime it was awkward. She felt a growing annoyance with this stranger who had put her in the position of one who owes gratitude. They were debtor and creditor; and as the debtor always hates the creditor, she was half beginning to hate the man who had saved her life.

And, after all, she must not let him presume on it. It was evident he was not of her kind. She was far from a snob, but she could not be blind to the difference between people—between the old rich and the new; between Boston and Chicago. What would Coombs think of him? Clive would probably have liked him, because Clive had played for Yale and been athletic-mad. But Coombs? She did not think he and Jack Moon would quite hit it off. Indeed, she must be careful, must not forget.

"Of course you know I'm frightfully grateful . . . and all that sort of thing," she began abruptly.

He shook his head. "No, it's me that's grateful."

Coombs would have said: "It is I who am grateful." But no matter. However, she rather resented his putting it that way.

"Why are *you* grateful?"

"Well . . . I can't just explain. Not just now."

She gave him a long, curious stare.

"Seems to me we've met before," she exclaimed. "There's something familiar about your voice, your manner. I may be mistaken, but if I'm right it will all come

back to me. . . . Why, look! We're coming to a settlement. What a picture!"

They saw a little shingly point with nets hanging on poles and canoes dipping down. The lagoon shimmered out in all the colors of the rainbow. The reef was a rampart of foam with a sonorous roar; but at their feet the wavelets rippled playfully. Hibiscus boughs dipped to the water, and the fallen blossoms floated like fairy boats. A girl, clad only in a sark, glided from the palm grove, launched a canoe, and vanished tranquilly round the point.

As they stood in the hot brightness, two tiny girls came towards them. One had brass ear-rings, and was eating an unripe mango. The children looked at the strangers in a laughing way. Then a shoal of little fishes flip-flapped on the beach and gleefully they pursued them.

The little ones ran off with their silvery trove, and again the waves made melody. From afar the surf supplied a deep bass. A fleet of honey-hued blossoms turned the water to flame, and tiny fishes leapt at the fairy boats. Placidly the palms gazed at their reflections, and swept in a clear curve of tree and inverted tree to etch themselves meticulously against the sky. Then two men clad in crimson and gold *pareus* came loafing down, and rested on their canoes with the careless grace of gods.

The castaways went up the beach and through a grove to a sunny clearing. On a fallen tree a boy was whittling, and the shadow of the leaves made a pattern on his bare brown back. The village was on a grassy point, shaded by lofty palms. Through their slim stems glimmered the sea, and by the tiny huts of thatch and bamboo were heaps of unhusked nuts. In sheds hung bunches of amber *feis*, while naked children stood in the doorways.

"Look!" said the girl, pointing. "Isn't that adorable!

A golden baby eating a golden mango. Oh, I'd love to kiss him!"

Through a hedge of crimson cat's-paw they saw him, all alone on the ground. He stared at them with big, black, wondering eyes, his fat face half-obscured by the huge yellow globe. Then as he suddenly howled with a mouth full of mango they hurriedly left him.

The whittling boy came after them. He held two magnificent mangoes, and with a bow presented them. It was done with the grace and gravity of a Spanish grandee. His dark eyes followed them and his small face was serious to the last.

"Have you got any money, Jack Moon?" said the girl.

He shook his head.

"Neither have I—only this. . . ."

She took from the pocket of her skirt a mushy mess, the little bunch of Indo-China Bank notes she had been carrying for her expenses.

"Hopeless! There's a Chink's store, though I'm afraid he won't give us anything on tick. Mangoes are all very well, but, oh, for a tin of salmon, a ship's biscuit, and a Fatima!"

Rather disconsolately they looked at the inevitable Chinaman's inevitable stock. Then gaily the girl attacked her mango.

"You know I never realized the value of money before. And I never knew what it was to be hungry before. What a priceless experience! Let's try to find out if there's a white man living near."

Alas! the natives spoke only Tahitian, and their answers were discouraging. Suddenly Felicity brightened.

"Why didn't I think of it? Didn't I tell you I was a big landowner on this island? I've got miles of cocoanut groves. Twenty thousand trees. Oh, I'm the little cocoa-

nut queen, I am. Let's go and visit my estate. Let me see. . . . It's near a place called . . . Hapiti. That's it."

At the name the brown faces lit up, and they pointed eagerly to the south; as to the distance they could give no indication.

"Never mind," said the girl. "Let's gird up our loins and hike to Hapiti."

"But you can't walk in your bare feet," he objected.

"Have to. We can't stay here. Lead on. Fifteen kilometers or fifty, I'm game."

The shining eyes about them were full of sympathy. All at once a woman broke away from the throng and hurried to a hut. She came running back, holding up a dilapidated pair of sneakers.

"American," she cried triumphantly. Then she bent down and slipped them on Felicity's feet. As she looked up her face was the picture of delight. The shoes were much too big, but a Godsend; for the girl's feet were already cut and bruised.

"Oh, you dear!" she said to the woman. "How can I thank you? What can I give you? Here . . . take this."

"This" was a diamond brooch that fastened her blouse in front. She pinned it on the other's not over-white Mother Hubbard. The woman protested vehemently.

"Pity I didn't think of it before," said Felicity. "We might have bartered it for bully beef at the Chink's. Well, come on, Jack Moon. *En avant.* It's a long, long hike to Hapiti."

2.

Moon strode through the palm groves, while Felicity slumped after him in her oversized "keds." From time to time he cast back at her a look of mingled pity and admiration, but she gave him a cheerful smile.

"Don't mind me. I'm all right. I'll show you I'm a good sport. If the worst comes to the worst you'll have to carry me. How will you like that?"

He would have liked nothing better. He would carry her with joy all round the island. This was his exultant thought as they trudged on.

They had gone ten kilometers, and no sign of another village. The road consisted of wheel-tracks with a toe-path between. In places they plunged into the green gloom of the grove, then came out and skirted the gleamy lagoon. By the roadside were patches of mud, crimson with soldier-crabs. In the glassy water were the black silhouettes of fishermen. They passed a black pig, on whose back sat a mina bird. There were trees of alligator pear, and little green limes, and dark bushes of wild coffee, and big green bread-fruit; and always huge mango-trees starred with fruit, green, purple, crimson, hanging by stringlike stalks.

"Are you thirsty?" he asked.

"A bit. Are you? A long lime squash with ice, for instance. No ice nearer than Papeete. What a parching land!"

The sun was grilling down, and every patch of shade was welcome.

"Wait," said he. "Here's a native hut in the clearing. I'll see what I can do."

It was a mere hutch, a bird-cage of a house. Long before they approached the smell of pig saluted them. In front of the door sprawled some semi-naked children, none too clean.

A woman came in answer to their call. Her face and body were emaciated, but her legs were elephantine. Through the doorway they could see a man lying on the

floor, wrapped in a blanket. The woman pointed to him, then indicated her own swollen legs: "Fay-fay."

They made her understand they were thirsty. Moving with difficulty she fetched a long pole, and knocked down two green cocoanuts. Holding a nut firmly on the ground, with a single blow of a machete she cut off the top. As Felicity looked through the hole in the thick rind, she saw the interior white as porcelain, and filled with crystalline liquor. Tilting it up she drank and drank, but she could not finish it. They thanked the woman, who beamed with pleasure and gave the impression that it was she who was grateful.

"Ripping!" said the girl; "but on an empty stomach. . . . Oh, my! I'm going along glug, glug with every step till I feel like an ambulant cocoanut. It must be about lunch time. Couldn't we scare up some bananas? I'm sick of the sight of a mango."

At another bamboo hut an old fellow in a loin-cloth presented them with all the plump bananas they could carry; and under the shade of an oleander bush they sat down to eat.

So busy were they devouring bananas they did not hear the approach of a man on a pony. He was in spotless white linen with a pith helmet. A long blue-black beard spread over his chest. He gave them a casual glance as they squatted by the roadside, a cold, scornful look.

"Did you see his face?" said Moon. "A white man. Shall I go after him?"

But Felicity held him back. "He looked 'kind o' 'aughty,' didn't he? As if we were poor white trash. No, if that's the sort of white man they have round here we'd better stick to the natives. After all, Jack Moon, you're only a beachcomber, and I might well be taken for a beachcomberess. The man with the black beard is evidently a

very high muck-a-muck on the island. Well, we'll go on. Are we downhearted? No, sir."

Nevertheless she was unusually thoughtful. Suddenly she gave a leap in the air so that one of her sneakers came off.

"I have it! A bright idea! Jack Moon, I owe you for my life. How can I do a little to pay my debt? That's worrying me an awful lot. I know. . . . I'll make you a 'cocoanut king.' I'm going to give you my plantation, deed it to you lawful. You'll go on living here and be happy ever after."

He looked at her with some dismay.

"Don't say a word. It's settled. When I want to do a thing I usually get my own way. Why, see! We're coming to a big clearing, and—as I live—to a real white man's bungalow. Now our troubles are at an end."

Then she stopped dubiously.

"Perhaps it's Blackbeard's. Perhaps they aren't at an end."

They crossed a lawn and climbed to a high veranda, but they had just reached the top step when a man came out and confronted them angrily. Sure enough it was Blackbeard.

CHAPTER II

A SINISTER HOST

"GO round to the servants' quarters," he said harshly.

He raised his hand to order them away; then his eyes fell on the girl, and he lowered it to stroke his long, forked beard.

"Hum!" he murmured thoughtfully.

He was a tall man, thin and wiry. He had a bald head, and rather a bulbous forehead. It was hard to tell what his eyes were like for he wore big horn spectacles with yellow glasses. His face, too, was hidden for the most part behind that forked beard, heavy mustache and flowing whiskers—all of the same dense blue-black. However, his cheeks were sallow, his cheek-bones high, his nose blunt and short.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded in a less hostile tone.

It was Moon who spoke.

"We're shipwrecked. Our boat hit the reef twenty kilometers north."

"What boat?"

Moon had seen the name on the stern, so he was able to answer: "The *Papeete Belle.*"

"Ah! That's Beauregard's boat, isn't it?"

"Yes. We swam ashore. I think we are the only survivors."

"The devil! Was Beauregard on board?"

"No, just the captain and two hands."

"Are you a sailor?"

Moon hesitated. "Yes," he answered.

"And the girl?"

Felicity realized that they must make very disreputable figures in the presence of this overbearing individual. She might be a half-caste, anything at all. She hastened to explain herself.

"I'm a visitor to Papeete, an artist, staying over a steamer. I thought I would like to see Moorea, so Monsieur Beauregard kindly put his boat at my disposal."

He was looking at her distrustfully. There was no cordiality in his harsh voice.

"I beg your pardon. Are you a friend of Beauregard's?"

"Not exactly. An acquaintance."

"I do not know him, but I have heard of him. Yes"—here his manner became curiously abstracted—"I have heard much of him. . . . Well, come in; sit down."

The invitation was grudging enough, but she accepted it. The man interested her. Though he had dropped his arrogance, there was a subtle insolence in his tone.

"I am only too delighted to offer you my humble hospitality. I regret that my wife is away on a visit at present; but my house, such as it is, is yours. You must be thirsty."

He struck a gong and a Chinaman appeared.

"Fang, a lime-juice."

Then he noticed Moon, who still stood on the top step of the veranda.

"Well, well, my man, can't you find your way round to the cookhouse? My servants will look after you."

Moon drew himself up. That glow had come into his eyes which always signaled an explosion. His hands were already clenched when he caught an imploring look from Felicity. With a sullen frown he left them.

The Chinaman brought a tray with a long tumbler of opaline liquid.

"Ice!" she cried delightedly.

"Yes. I have a little left. That reminds me, the boat will call the day after to-morrow, and you will be able to return to Papeete. Sorry your stay will be so short, but we are primitive over here, not prepared to entertain visitors."

She sipped her lime squash tranquilly. She was rather enjoying the situation. She might be disheveled and forlorn looking, but she was Felicity Arden, of Boston—a person of some consequence. The thought gave her assurance.

"Can't you offer me a cigarette?" she sighed. "I'm dying for an Abdullah."

Again he struck the gong. The Chinaman brought her a packet of English cigarettes, which she began to consume contentedly. He watched her uneasily, his long, yellow hand caressing his forked beard. It was a reflective and strangely disturbing gaze. There was an awkward silence, which she broke.

"You seem to have a fine plantation here. Why are those bands of tin round the palms?"

"To keep the rats from climbing up. We have lots of rats."

"But no snakes."

"No, it's an Eden without the snake."

"Except, I suppose, the white man who introduces civilization."

"Oh, that's rot. The natives are better off now than ever they were."

"I see. Well, you really have a fine place."

"Yes, it's a good estate. But it costs money to keep

up, lots of money. Some day it may return a profit . . . some day."

"May I ask if you are the lucky—or unlucky—owner?"

"Yes and no. Practically I consider it mine, though theoretically I am only the manager. You see, the owner is far away and takes no interest in the property. Everything is in my hands. My name, by the way, is Gridley, Calvin Gridley. May I ask yours, Miss——"

"Not 'Miss,' 'Mrs.' Mrs. . . ." She hesitated a moment, then added: "Smith."

"Ah! Smith. There are so many Smiths in Papeete. Not connected with any of them, are you?"

"No, only a tourist."

"Well, I know so little of what's going on. I am more or less of a recluse. Once in a while only I see a paper. The world begins to interest me less and less. But you want to wash and rest before dinner. I have a room my wife uses, so you can have it till her return. I wish I could offer you some of her clothes, but my wife is a large woman, a very large woman."

Here he sighed; then he shouted: "Mowera!"

A young Tahitian girl, crowned with flowers, pushed aside the fringed screen of the doorway.

"See this lady has all she needs," he commanded. His manner had lost some of its ungraciousness now. He seemed resigned. The native girl bowed with a flash of milky teeth.

"You follow me, lady. I show you."

How delicious it was to stand under a shower-bath once again, and to rub down with a coarse towel!

"Shower-baths and ice," she sighed ecstatically. "But that man! What a hypocrite! What a rogue!"

For she was not unfamiliar with the name of Calvin

Gridley. In fact, her agents posted a fat check every quarter to that same individual.

"Well, we're going to have a pretty reckoning. But I just want to draw him a little, see how far he'll go."

There was a knock at the bathroom door. Mowera was waiting. She had some fine underclothes which had never been worn, and a laundered linen frock.

"Me, I buy them. They fit you, I think. I lend them you."

When Felicity was dressed she looked at herself delightedly. She and the slim Mowera were about the same height, and the white linen gown trimmed with lace was exquisitely fresh and cool.

"Now, lady, I brush your hair Tahitian way."

She sat still, while with long sweeping strokes the girl wielded the brush till every hair seemed to gleam like a silken thread from root to tip. She tended that tawny hair as if she loved it, taking it up in her hand and kissing it.

"I never brush hair like that. You all same princess, I think."

She gave Felicity a shell wreath to put round her neck, and a crown of flowers. A pair of straw slippers completed the costume. When the girl gazed at herself in the cheap mirror she was enraptured.

"Why, Mowera, what a darling you are! I think I'll steal you, make you my maid. Come with me to America."

But Mowera laughingly shook her head.

Felicity sat on the window-sill enjoying the fresh breeze from the lagoon. The lawn dipped down to the beach, but it was not a nice lawn. The grass had the air of coming up furtively, almost fearfully. It was, in short, a mangy lawn.

"Land-crabs," she said disgustedly.

And, indeed, all round the house the ground was honey-

combed by the loathsome creatures. They seemed to poison the land, devouring first the vegetation, then each other. Underneath her window she could see them watching from a hundred holes, with beady eyes that stood out on pins. Their nippers were large and snapped ferociously. Even their color was repulsive—a muddy yellow, suggestive of slime and decay.

She descended by the veranda and made her way to the beach. The land-crabs were so thick in places that the very ground seemed to rise up and seethe around her. They were uncannily watchful. On her approach they scuttled off in a twinkling, and all she saw was a black hole and two gleaming jet beads that seemed to follow her movements. She threw a twig to the mouth of one of these holes. Quick a large claw seized it, drew it down. The very ground seemed barren and unclean. Even the cocoanut palms curved up from a bulgy base that had a mud-corroded, crab-eaten look. She returned to her window not a little disgusted.

On the far side of the clearing she saw Moon. She signaled to him. At first he did not recognize her, and stared inquiringly. He was beholding her through a screen of croton vines that framed her like a picture.

"How do you like me, Jack Moon? What sort of Tahitian girl would I make?"

He could only stare in wonder. Admiration made him breathless. Something seemed to compress his heart. He knew that picture framed in wine and honey-colored vines would haunt him always, and he gazed speechlessly.

"Well, have you no pretty compliments to make me?" she asked, tossing her head. "Never mind. You're too late now. Tell me instead, have you had your supper? Are they looking after you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I found a native yonder

who gave me some raw fish. I want nothing from that stiff. He looked at me as if I was a land-crab."

"Oh, you poor man!" She lowered her voice. "You know, I'm not exactly crazy about him myself."

She turned quickly. Was it fancy that she thought she saw against the light screen over her doorway a dark shadow? No, it was gone.

"I say, Jack Moon, you haven't got such a thing as a revolver?"

"Alas! my automatic got rusted in the sea. I've cleaned it up, but I've no more shells. Why?"

"Oh, it's all right. Only . . . there are no doors to these rooms, and . . . well, it's safer to have something. One never knows. Ha! here's Blackbeard coming."

Calvin Gridley picked his way amid the land-crab burrows. He regarded Moon with rancor. He was about to say something arrogant when he caught sight of Felicity.

"How charming!" he exclaimed. "A thousand compliments, Mrs. Smith. *La belle Tahitienne.* Ah! you should remain here and adopt the country." Then he gazed after the retreating Moon. "Who is our rough friend, anyway? I don't like his looks."

"I do," said Felicity. "I think he's one of the finest looking men I ever saw. And a natural gentleman. Besides, you must remember, he saved my life."

Gridley frowned slightly. "I'll try to remember that," he remarked dryly. "All the same, he seems to me rather like a Barbary corsair. But dinner's ready, if you are, Mrs. Smith."

Mowera served dinner, which they ate on the balcony. There was a clear soup, curried shrimps, chicken, and ice cream. Decidedly, Calvin Gridley lived well, and his cook was a treasure. However, he himself did not eat much. He smoked cigarettes in a long black holder, and glowered

at her steadily through his yellow spectacles. A lamp shone on his bald head, and one lean, yellow hand caressed his forked beard. There was a marked constraint between them—on his part a certain nervousness, on hers a curious repulsion. She felt something about him oddly unwholesome. He seemed weary, too, and twice he put up his hand to stifle a yawn.

"Excuse me," he murmured.

"Poor Mr. Gridley! I fear you work too hard."

He assented vaguely, and became more apathetic than ever.

Felicity did not care. She was furiously hungry, and the food was so good. She was thinking, however:

"What would he say if he knew who I was? . . . If ever I live here I'll build a house up on the hill far away from those beastly land-crabs. . . . Why doesn't the man talk more instead of staring at me as if he'd never seen a white woman for a year? Maybe he hasn't though."

She tried to draw him into conversation about his island affairs, but he was strangely reticent. Finally he smoked in a bored silence.

"Here I am looking extra nice," she thought; "and yet I'll swear this queer man would be jolly glad to be rid of me."

She refused coffee on the plea that it would keep her awake and said good-night.

He answered dreamily: "Good-night, dear Mrs. Smith. Pleasant dreams to you."

Going to her room she examined her bed carefully for spiders. Mowera had left her a large, floppy night-dress. She did not use it, however. Taking off the pretty lace-trimmed frock she drew the mosquito-curtains close and fell asleep.

She had the most fantastic dreams. She thought that

she was being chased by a gigantic land-crab. It had her in its claws, when suddenly it changed into Calvin Gridley. She awoke all a-tremble.

The air had a putrid odor that suggested land-crabs, possibly accounting for her dream. The moon was flooding in, and from somewhere in the grove came shrieks and yells. Tiptoeing to the window she peered out. In the cleared space about fifty yards behind the house a wild dance was going on. Semi-nude figures of men and women were performing extraordinary antics to a voluptuous melody. There was something hysterical in the laughter of the women, something triumphantly animal in the shouts of the men. It made her think of a Bacchanalian orgy, of fauns and satyrs. It reminded her of a statue she had seen somewhere. Where? . . . Ah! in the Luxembourg Gardens, The Triumph of Silenus. And always in the midst of the revels she thought she saw a tall man with a long, rank beard. She wondered. . . . Then, saying: "This is not for you, my child," she went back to her bed.

Again she dreamed. Silenus had stolen away from the mad merriment, and was standing by her bed. His look was possessive. He seemed to poise libidinously over her, gloating a moment before he took her in his arms. But in that moment she screamed, and screaming awoke herself.

And behold not Silenus but Calvin Gridley was bending over her. He had a wreath of flowers round his head, and he wore only a loin-cloth. Through his yellow glasses his eyes had a mad light, while his body dripped with sweat. Again she screamed. There was a hoarse shout from the window. . . .

She sprang up and rubbed her eyes. No, there was no one. She must have dreamed again. Once more going to the window she looked out. The grove was silent and deserted. Then below the window she saw a shadow.

"Jack Moon!"

"Yes, I thought I'd watch. You seemed to be afraid."

"Oh, you poor man!" she whispered. "You not sleeping down there with the land-crabs?"

"It's all right. The land-crabs are sleeping too. I'll stay here till dawn. I want to feel that you're safe."

"But . . . Oh! this is dreadful. You mustn't."

"No, it's all right. I'm mighty happy."

"Dear me! I'm so sorry."

In a way she was glad though. And for the third time she lay down, and secure in his protection slept till morning.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEERNESS OF GRIDLEY

1.

GLADLY the dawn smiled up the sky, brightening into the invariable beauty of a Tahitian morn. Amid the fawn-gray stems of the palms she could see the silver of the lagoon. Resplendent were leaf and blade, melodious the grove. And in all this confident glory of light the events of the night seemed more than ever like a hideous dream.

Her breakfast consisted of coffee, fruit, toast, and New Zealand butter. Mowera, who served her, was pale and weary. Her smiles were like the ghosts of her former smiles. Fang, the Chinese cook, had a tired and sullen look. In fact, over the entire household seemed to hang an air of lassitude and ennui.

Felicity was far from reflecting the general *malaise*. Indeed it seemed to accentuate her brightness, and as she mended her skirt and blouse she sang gayly. When she had made them almost presentable, she went for a stroll along the beach.

She crossed a number of tiny streams, in one of which she surprised two girls bathing. With the eye of an artist she noted the suave lines of their golden bodies. When they espied her, down they ducked in the sweet water; so that all she could see was their sleek, black heads and their bright, curious eyes.

Through a gorgeous screen of croton vines was a beautifully made hut, with walls of bamboo, and a thatched roof

of palm fronds. Golden yellow it stood against the lucent green of a banana grove. In front, weeding a taro patch, was a girl in a crimson *pareu*. Her body was like bronze; bronze, too, the clumps of cocoanuts that swung over her head.

The heat throbbed down; the lagoon glimmered like a sheet of beaten silver, but in the grove was a green coolness. Crash! It was only a falling cocoanut. How it startled her in that cloistral calm! The ground was littered with fallen nuts. In the groves they were rusty brown, but out on the crab-riddled foreshore they were bleached gray by the sun. By grove and beach she walked for a long way, seeing no other sign of life. Then on rounding a point she came on a lively scene.

In a little glistening cove, moored to a long, ramshackle wharf, was a dingy coasting boat. A gang of Chinamen were loading it with sacks of cocoanuts. The approach to the wharf was of single planks, laid on trestles over the water. Along this the laborers were proceeding cautiously, packing on their backs the sacks of nuts. The footing seemed precarious, and even as she looked a Chinaman slipped and plunged into the water.

Fortunately it was only waist deep, so he floundered ashore, towing his sack after him. But a man was awaiting him as he landed, a stocky, red-haired man in dirty ducks and a hat of pandanus straw. This man promptly knocked him down, kicked him to his feet, knocked him down again.

"Blast yer yellow hide, ye son of a Canton sweep!" roared the red man. "Can't ye watch yer feet? Do that again and I'll land ye a wallop that'll locomotive ye to the hospital."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Smith."

Calvin Gridley was at her elbow. His greeting was not

cordial; indeed, she had the idea that her presence there was rather undesirable.

"I'm surprised to see you here," he said. "You've come a long way."

"Yes, I've had quite a long walk. How busy you seem to be!"

"Oh, no. Just shipping a few nuts."

"Yes, but with all your other lines. Coming along I saw sheds and sheds of copra."

"Er . . . yes. You see, I do a bit of trading with the natives on my own." He gave a deprecating shrug. "Of course, the estate always produces a little, but it was run down when I first took hold, and the trees don't yield what they ought."

"How fascinating! How interesting it all is! I should love it. Don't you want to employ a secretary, Mr. Gridley? Me, for instance."

He looked at her for a moment; then gave an uneasy laugh.

"Nothing I would like better, but . . . my wife. What would she say to my having a young and beautiful secretary? Ah, no, my dear Mrs. Smith, I fear I must go on handling the business end all by myself. Luckily I have an overseer who looks after the practical side. That's him —the red fellow. He used to be a mate on a schooner, but no one would sail with him at the last. Too bad a reputation as a man-handler. 'Ironjaw Jones,' they call him."

Here Jones came up and carefully expectorated.

"Hullo, Boss. See me handle that Chink? . . . Howdy, ma'am. Heerd ye was here. . . . No argyment like a fightin' fist. Slam the fear of the divil into them lads. It's the only system."

Ironjaw Jones looked quite capable of furnishing no

end of such arguments. His heavy arms, protruding from a sleeveless singlet, were furzed with rufous hair, and terminated in sledge-hammer fists. Further, his pugnacity was attested by a prognathous jaw and choleric blue eyes. He waited for further opportunities of displaying his particular gifts, but for the moment none offered.

"Won't the natives do this work?" asked Felicity.

"Naw!" said Ironjaw disgustedly. "A native'll work for the price of a *pareu* or a bottle of booze, then he quits. You can't put no pep into them fellers. Natchral born loafers, that's what they is."

Felicity thought she saw wisdom in their attitude. She was observing Calvin Gridley, who looked more listless than ever. He stifled a yawn, then turned to her.

"Mrs. Smith, you'll be glad to hear the Papeete boat got in. It makes a trip round the island, and to-morrow will take you back to town. Sorry that your visit, though so eventful, must be short. This is an interesting place, where you can study the primitive Tahitian in all his picturesqueness. A strange place, too, haunted by legend and myth. Moorea, the Mysterious, it is often called."

"Yes, I wish I could see more of it. Couldn't you put up with me for a few days longer?"

Again he gave that uneasy laugh.

"I'd like to, but I fear we have no accommodation. You see, with Mrs. Gridley's return things will be . . . ah! different."

"All right. If you are going to turn me out I suppose I must go."

She sighed in mock regret.

"Say, Boss! what about that shipment of copra for the oil factory?" broke in Ironjaw Jones. "We'll have it ready next week."

"Very good, Jones. I'll get a boat from Papeete."

As the two were going into details, Felicity left them and made her way back to the bungalow.

"Shiploads of nuts," she was thinking. "Cargoes of copra. And what else? And here I'm paying this man six thousand a year to run the place."

2.

At lunch Calvin Gridley seemed to have thrown off something of his spleen. He was unpleasantly amiable, gazing at her thoughtfully through his yellow glasses and caressing his forked beard.

"I'm sorry you're leaving us so soon," he sighed.

"But I'm not leaving you. You're sending me away."

"Oh, no, not at all. Only, you see, sometimes circumstances . . ."

"Meaning Mrs. Gridley."

"Well, you know what women are. There might be trouble, jealousy . . ."

"I assure you I should give her no grounds for jealousy. But there! I don't intend to stay, so that ends it. I wouldn't stay now if you went down on your bended knees and begged me to. I don't like you."

"What is it you don't like about me, Mrs. Smith?"

"Your beard for one thing. How do I know what's behind all that. What kind of masculine beauty does it conceal? I tell you what . . . I'd like to get a pair of scissors and just *clip*."

At the last word Calvin Gridley gave a curious start. He clutched his beard fearfully as if to protect it.

"You wouldn't dare."

"If I were your wife I should."

"You're a dangerous woman. As Delilah sheared off the locks of Samson, you would deprive me of my beard,

the source of all my virtue. Yes, I'm glad you are going away, Mrs. Smith."

They rose from the table on the worst of terms. He irritated her profoundly, and at times disgusted her. She would be glad when she was back in Papeete. She thought she might discomfort him by declaring her identity; but, then, she always hated a scene. No, when she got back, Calvin Gridley would receive from her agents a notice that his engagement was at an end. Then she would turn the whole place over to Moon.

By the way, where was the beachcomber? She had not seen a sign of him all day. Probably catching up his lost sleep, poor man. Well, he must not play the watchdog again under her window. She would not allow it. All the same, she rather dreaded the night. Things seemed to change so after the sun went down; even people; especially Calvin Gridley. She got paper and pencil, and spent the afternoon making sketches.

At dinner her host was brighter than she had yet seen him. Yet it did not seem quite a natural brightness. It was as if he were lit up from within by some artificial light. He wore the white evening dress of the tropics, and had ordered a dinner of exceptional excellence. It was served on the veranda in the shade of the croton vines. A lamp in the center shed a soft luster on the damask cloth. There was a glitter of crystal and a gleam of silver. In the center was a great bowl of pink roses. In spite of herself Felicity responded to it all. It was so very jolly, in a primitive island of the South Seas, to have dainty dishes sympathetically served. She complimented him.

"Yes," he said, "one can be very comfortable here if one knows how to go about it."

"Why don't you build away from this beastly land-crab belt. The air is *infect*."

"Some day I will," he answered dreamily.

"And why don't you put up an oil-mill and mill your own copra?"

"Some day I may," he responded, still more dreamily. Suddenly he bent towards her. He seemed excited, and his voice was hoarse.

"Mrs. Smith, have I told you you are a desperately fascinating woman?"

"Don't be silly, Mr. Gridley."

"You are. You're making me forget myself, say things I shouldn't."

"How interesting! Please say them."

"You pretend to be frivolous and even cynical, but I know you better. You are fire on ice. Listen, I am going to surprise you. . . . Mrs. Smith, how would you like to be mistress of all this?"

He waved a comprehensive hand.

"You mean of the hills and the stars and the sea? Polynesia generally?"

"No, I mean of this estate, this plantation."

"I don't understand."

"I can make you mistress of it."

"But . . . it's not yours."

"It will be mine—and shortly. I'll get control. I've saved a bit of money. A bill for labor will be presented against the estate that will make the owners stagger. Jones is fixing that up. Then, through someone else, I'll make an offer to take it off their hands at a price a little above the debts. They'll be glad to let it go. They don't know anything about it. A pack of rich people in the East. Soon it will be mine, all mine."

"Indeed. Well, where do *I* come in?"

"With me. As Mrs. Calvin Gridley."

"But . . . there's one already."

He bent forward, still more eagerly.

"No, there isn't. . . . We . . . aren't married. We're supposed to be, but we aren't. I can send her packing if you just say the word. Then we'll get married in regular fashion, I promise you that."

"You . . . you overwhelm me."

"Do I? Is it a go?"

She stared at him in amazement. He had not been drinking, she was sure of that; and yet there was something very strange about him. Obviously he was out of control. A sudden fear that she had to do with a madman made her rise. Then her alarm increased, for he seized her hands across the table.

"I'm a fool," he cried. "I've said too much. It's that cursed . . ."

He checked himself, but his manner grew menacing.

"Look here, you know you're at my mercy. I'm boss of this island. I can do anything here. I could have you taken to-night into the mountains. They might search, but they would never find you. And no one would connect me with it. Now suppose you drive me to do that? Suppose you disappear? Suppose . . ."

He stopped suddenly and let go her hand. He was staring over her shoulder. Then she heard a deep calm voice:

"Suppose you introduce me to our guest, *cher ami.*"

CHAPTER IV

CAPTURE

1.

IT was a woman who had parted the fiber screen, and stood framed in the doorway. The doorway, however, seemed too inadequate a frame, for she was a very bulky woman. She had a long, heavy, horse-like face; her eyes had the wicked twinkle of a satyr and her loose mouth a cynical smile. She was smoking a pandanus leaf cigarette.

"You two seem to be holding hands," she observed dryly.

"No . . . Ha! ha! . . . I was just saying good-night to Mrs. Smith. She is still tired from her shipwreck and wanted to retire early."

The large woman extended a pudgy hand, on which gleamed a ring as big as a hazelnut, composed of a cluster of small diamonds.

"Mrs. Smith, I hope this husband of mine has been behaving himself. When I heard we had a visitor I hurried here. The French constable gave me a lift. I believe he has come to arrest some beachcomber man."

Felicity gave a start. Could it be Jack Moon?

"Mrs. Smith, I was shocked to hear of your dreadful experience."

"Yes, when you're not used to them shipwrecks are rather a bore," Felicity replied, finding voice at last.

She wondered how much Mrs. Gridley had heard. If

she were annoyed the stout woman concealed it admirably. There was a tolerant smile on her sensual lips. She had the wise eyes of a reformed but unrepentant pirate, and on her massive breast glimmered a huge pendant of pearl blister.

"Well, Mrs. Smith, if you are really tired we will not detain you," said Calvin Gridley.

"No, have a good rest," said Mrs. Gridley. "We will see you in the morning. The boat calls at eight, so you will have to be up early."

Felicity went to her room. Thoughtfully she tapped a cigarette, then lit it. No doubt the Gridleys were having it out. Yes, she could hear a woman's voice speaking in French.

"She's too pretty by far."

"I tell you she's going. I told her she must go."

"Who is she?"

"Oh, some friend of Beauregard's. Tried to vamp me."

Felicity heard no more, but she stamped her foot angrily. She was anxious about Moon. She must warn him. She would smoke her cigarette down by the beach. Maybe she might see him there.

What a wonderful night! A proud, impartial moon was painting scenes of unearthly splendor, and there was the perfect stillness that goes with perfect moonlight. It was full of penetrating peace, of softness and unreality. The groves of cocoanut were somber, but through their bar-like stems glimmered the lagoon. The moon-silver faintly undulated on the water. It wimpled in till at her feet it grew tense like the wire of a guitar. Then it broke melodiously to a scattering of pearls and diamonds. Afar, the reef was a forlorn welter of foam, and as each comber reared like a wall of jade the moon pierced it with a silver rapier. Beneath the glinting palms the curving strand

was ivory clear, and the surf made a hollow lowing that swelled and died away. She had the feeling that all nature was adoring the moon, which in its triumph seemed every moment to grow more resplendent.

She saw no one, so she returned to her room, and going to the window gazed out. The house was raised on pillars of cement, so that its floor stood high off the ground. As she looked down, she thought she saw a dark shadow.

She whistled softly. The shadow moved towards her.

"That you, Jack Moon?"

"Yes, lady."

"You're not going to sleep there again to-night?"

"It's all right."

"No, it isn't. There's no need. Blackbeard has enough trouble on his hands without bothering about poor little me. The danger's for you, I think. They're looking for someone—the police, I mean. I wonder . . ."

"Yes, it's me. I've been in hiding all day."

"Who told you?"

"The girl, Mowera."

"I see. What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know. An officer came over in the boat with a warrant. Some of Beauregard's work, I think."

"Ah! What will you do?"

"Go back into the hills for a time. There's lots of food. I'll be all right."

"That's best perhaps. When I get back to Papeete I'll see the Police Commissioner, and find out what's wrong. I'll soon arrange things. It's only a matter of a few days. Don't let them arrest you. Go away at once. *Hist!* What's that? Here they are. . . . Go now. . . ."

Moon turned and leaped like a deer for the clearing.

At the same moment a shadow sprang from the basement of the house, and a pistol-shot rang out. Missed!

For the beachcomber dashed on. Would he get clear? If once he could make the grove all would be well. Leaning far out of the window the girl held her hand to her heart to still its wild beating.

"Run!" she cried. "You're safe, safe!"

Suddenly from three corners of the clearing she saw three men converge on the fugitive. They all met at the same moment and rolled over in a confused heap. There in the moonlight a furious struggle was going on. Then came a voice which she recognized as that of Ironjaw Jones:

"Steady there, you bloody pirate! We've got you cinched, and blast me stiff it'll take a stronger lad than you to get away."

Yes, they had him. They were tying his wrists with small rope, hoisting him on his feet. One of them was the Raratongan captain of the *Papeete Belle*, another the local gendarme. Then the man who had fired also joined them, and she saw it was Calvin Gridley.

Someone was at her elbow. She turned with a start. It was Mrs. Gridley. In the pale moonlight the woman's face was more dark and equine than ever. Her eyes twinkled with that amused malice, and her sensuous lips curved cruelly.

"You're sorry they've got him," she observed.

"Rather. You see he's a friend of mine. He saved my life."

"You have some strange friends, Mrs. Smith. The man's a low-down beachcomber. There's a charge against him of assault, and also one of piracy. With Monsieur Beauregard to press the charges it will go hard with him when they get him to Papeete."

"Oh, I'll attend to that," said the girl haughtily. "Monsieur Beauregard is not the only power in the land."

"He stands mighty high with the Governor. He'll get a conviction, and it's the *bague* for that lad there. You understand? New Caledonia."

"There's the American Consul."

"You forget where you are, Mrs. Smith. You're not in America now. This is semi-savage Tahiti. I don't know what influence you can have. Who are you, anyway? You come here all alone. You make friends with low-down characters. You have nothing to do with any of the better people except with Monsieur Beauregard, whose reputation as an *homme galant* is well known. You are, it seems to me, not in a very strong position to help your friends. However, do not forget. . . . To-morrow the boat leaves at eight. You will be able to accompany your associate, the prisoner, to Papeete."

With that Mrs. Gridley departed. Felicity heard her bare feet patter across the veranda. The girl was exasperated, but she controlled herself. Again she peered out into the moonlight clearing. The figures had disappeared.

For over an hour she waited, watching intently. Then she let herself drop from the window and slipped across the clearing. She was sure no one had seen her from the house.

Now she had come to the grove. She halted, tremulous, irresolute, when a hand was softly laid on her arm.

CHAPTER V

ESCAPE

"MOWERA!"

"Yes, lady."

"You startled me. Have they got him?"

"Yes, lady. They got him. Lock him tool-house."

"Is there no way of escape?"

"I don't know. I don't think."

"If you can help me, Mowera, I'll give you anything you ask."

"I don't want you give me something. I help 'cause I like that man. You stay here. I go see."

Keeping in the black shadow Felicity waited. Half an hour passed. Mowera did not return. Felicity was growing anxious when, moving from shadow to shadow, the girl glided to her side.

"Well?"—eagerly.

"I think one plan. Him tied hands, feet too, in small house down by taro field. Raratonga man him drunk, no count. Monsieur Jones guard porch along French gendarme. Jones he make love me. Like me very much. I go long him. We go grove. You come. Gendarme, he sleep. You go in house. Set big fellah free."

"You are sure the captain is drunk and the gendarme asleep?"

"Sure. Jones he wait for me. I take care him. Rest very easy."

"All right. Go on."

Mowera vanished. There was a field of taro whose broad

leaves glistened in the moonlight. Beyond this, mistily, Felicity saw a small hut. From the rear of the hut she could now hear a girl's low laugh and a man's gruff voice. The sounds grew fainter, then there was silence again.

Keeping in the shelter of the grove she stole along the edge of the taro patch. How she wished the moon were not so bright! It revealed the porch of the little shack, and the dark form of the sleeping policeman. At least, she hoped he was sleeping. His head was buried in a blanket to keep off the mosquitoes, but their busy hum mingled with his snore. Could she steal into that dark interior without awakening him? Well, she must try.

Step by step she drew near, feeling her footing on the littered ground. Once she trod on a dry palm leaf that seemed to crack like a pistol. Quickly she crouched in the gloom at the edge of the porch. Her heart was beating painfully. With eyes of fright she saw the gendarme start up, throw off his covering, stare dazedly all about him.

"*Ces sacrés moustiques!*"

Then he buried his head hastily in his blanket, and his snores made tuneful music in her ears.

Once more she stole on, testing every step. How the flooring of the porch creaked! She was afraid it would awaken the man again. If so, she was lost. She tried every board before she put her weight on it. Now she was at the door.

It was locked, but the key was in the lock. She turned it softly, and, luckily, it did not squeak. Inch by inch she pushed open the door, listening acutely. Black darkness inside. Only through chinks in the boarding did the flood of moonlight leak in. One of these rays touched a huddled form in the corner, fell, indeed, on his hands where the cords cut into his wrists. He was face down, and could not turn his head.

Better to close the door perhaps. She did so gently, bit by bit. There, it was done. Now for the prisoner. . . .

Suddenly she started. A shudder seemed to run down her spine. She choked back a scream. With sheer horror she stared and stared. . . .

It was an eye she saw, a glistening eye that glared at her out of the dark. She sank weakly, but that awful eye continued to transfix her. Then she saw that it was the glass eye of the Raratongan. A ray of moonlight penetrating through a knot-hole was bearing right on it. The rest of his face was in shadow, and he lay in a deep, drunken sleep. Stepping around him she groped her way to the prisoner. Bending low, she whispered:

"Don't make a sound. I've come to free you."

He started as if from a light slumber. He wrenched his head round, but could see nothing.

"Untie my hands if you can," he said softly.

She fumbled at the cords, but they were knotted sailor fashion, and in the darkness she could not loosen them.

"You shouldn't have done this," he told her under his breath. "You don't know what danger you're running. If they heard you in the darkness they'd shoot. You've no right to run this risk for me."

"Never mind about me. I'm determined you get free. Oh, these knots! There goes another finger-nail."

"Can't you cut them? . . . Hush!"

It was the Raratongan. He turned uneasily in his sleep, rolled over, grunted.

"He's got a sheath-knife in his belt. Maybe you can edge it out."

She groped over to the captain. Her fingers touched the knife and she withdrew it softly. The edge was razor sharp. She was about to sever the wrist cords when she heard a sudden noise.

It was the gendarme on the porch. He was getting up this time. Quick as thought she dropped in the shadow where no moonlight penetrated. She heard his step on the porch.

"*Tiens! Tiens!*"

He was trying the door, surprised to find it unlocked.

"*Bon sang!* I thought I turned the key."

He was uneasy. He opened the door and stood there a moment, a black shadow, revolver in hand. Then, stepping over the Raratongan, he entered. Bending down he felt the prisoner's bonds. As the girl crouched she could have touched him. Apparently satisfied, he went out, locking the door this time.

She waited until she heard him lie down again, then swiftly she severed the cords. Moon was free.

Free, yet still a prisoner. The locked door! Their plight was worse than ever. He looked overhead at the corrugated iron roof, around at the frame walls. No sign of a window.

"Seems as if we were trapped," she said desperately.

But he was feeling at the flooring. The hut was raised on sills about three feet from the ground. Ah! it was as he thought. On the beams thick planks had been laid without being nailed. They fitted badly. Getting his fingers in a chink, bit by bit he raised one of them.

"Can you squeeze through?"

He held up the plank while she lowered herself. With considerable effort he managed to squeeze after her. Very softly he let the board slip into place again.

They crawled from under the house. He was really free now. They had gained the grove and were speeding up a path when they heard voices a few yards ahead. Quickly they crouched behind the bulbous root of a giant palm.

It was Mowera and Ironjaw returning. With that marvelous vision of the native the girl must have seen them, for, as she passed, she suddenly threw her arms round the man's neck, and blinded his eyes with her kisses.

"Here," he said, "you're some lovin' little doll this night. But hang up on the soft stuff. I gotta get back to the calaboose."

They passed on.

"You'd better hurry to the house," said Moon. "They may miss you. And there's danger everywhere. I'm all right now."

"You'll go up into the mountains for a while and keep there?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go to Papeete and move heaven and earth to save you."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"Grateful be hanged. I'm only paying my debt. Good luck to you, Jack Moon."

"Good-by, lady. God bless you."

He was gone, and swiftly she made her way back. As she tiptoed across the broad veranda, from a gloomy nook came the faint glow of a cigarette tip. At first she thought it was Calvin Gridley, but a deep female voice broke the silence:

"You seem fond of moonlight walks, Mrs. Smith. If I didn't know there was no one worthy of the rôle round here, I should say you had a lover."

CHAPTER VI

FELICITY GIVES HERSELF AWAY

THE jocund wind was trumpeting in the tufted palms as Felicity awoke and stared out through a mist of mosquito-curtain.

She was drowsily closing her eyes again, when she remembered she had to catch the Papeete boat.

How glad she would be to get back to her little bungalow. It seemed ages since she had left it. She had had enough of adventure now to last her a lifetime. She was ready to return to civilization, to take up her place in society; yes, even to marry Coombs. Especially was she glad to see the last of that hateful couple, the Gridleys.

So almost joyfully she performed the sketchy toilet that was all the place afforded. As for dressing, she had been sleeping in her clothes. She was a sight to go to Papeete, but as everyone there would know of her mishap it would not matter. Hark! that must be the whistle of the boat.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Gridley."

She said this because that bulky lady was blocking the doorway.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Gridley did not budge. Her mahogany-colored face had the leering smile of a lewd idol.

"I'm going, Mrs. Gridley."

"You're not, Mrs. Smith."

Felicity paused in amazement.

"What's the matter? I thought you wanted to be rid of me?"

"So we do; but first certain things have to be explained."

"What d'you mean?"

"You're very innocent, Mrs. Smith. Perhaps you don't know that the prisoner escaped last night—aided by someone in this house."

Once more the whistle shrilled. Mrs. Gridley in her billowy Mother Hubbard still hugely blocked the doorway. Felicity stamped her foot.

"Come on, my good woman, get out of my way. You don't mean to say you're going to detain me."

"I do."

"Oh! . . . Go to the devil!"

She was angry now. She was going to charge that mountain of flesh when she remembered that the room had another door giving on the dining-room. She ran to it, but there stood Calvin Gridley. He was in pink pajamas.

"No, you don't," he said.

The third whistle of the little gasoline boat piped querulously.

"Listen! You're too late now," said Mrs. Gridley. "We'd be glad to see you on that boat, but there's the law to satisfy. Ah! here comes the sergeant."

The representative of the law was the gendarme of the night before. He was crestfallen, yet tried to cover it with an air of importance.

"Will you permit me to ask you some questions, Madame," he said uncomfortably, tugging at a ropy mustache.

"No, I won't," snapped Felicity. "I don't see what right you or anyone else has to put questions to me."

"There!" said Mrs. Gridley triumphantly. "I told you she wouldn't submit to any cross-examination."

The gendarme, a simple fellow, was at a loss.

"Was Madame out in the grove last night between twelve and one?"

She did not answer.

"Of course she was. I met her coming back," said Mrs. Gridley.

"The prisoner was a friend of Madame's," the gendarme suggested.

"A friend! Yes, perhaps more than a friend," insinuated Mrs. Gridley.

Felicity lost her temper. She turned on the woman furiously:

"Silence, you horrible creature." Then to the gendarme: "Well, I don't care. . . . I was in the grove last night, and it was I who helped the prisoner to escape. You hear me—I. Now do what you like. Arrest me. Put the machinery of the law in motion."

There was a long silence. The Gridleys exchanged glances of triumph. The little gendarme tugged at his big mustache more distressfully than ever. He pondered. Finally he decided.

"Undoubtedly assisting a criminal to escape constitutes a serious crime in itself. I must consider this lady my prisoner. But there is no need to take her into custody. She cannot escape. She can remain here until the next boat, then I will take her back with me to Papeete. That is, if by that time we have not recaptured the man. And now if you will excuse me I will set about my plans for tracking him down."

He went off rather glad to get so nicely out of the dilemma.

Felicity sat down on the bed. It was too fantastic. She wanted to shriek. She laughed a bit hysterically. Then she lit a cigarette and puffed out the smoke at them.

Mrs. Gridley had folded her arms. Her mouth was compressed with vindictive determination.

"We don't want this woman here, do we, Gridley?"

Calvin Gridley, frowning and stroking his beard, indorsed her statement by his silence.

"We don't harbor criminals in this house, do we, Gridley?"

At this Calvin Gridley shook his head several times.

"Then order her out."

"You've got to go," said Calvin Gridley harshly.

"What if I refuse?"

"Turn her out," said Mrs. Gridley.

"Come on," said Gridley. "Don't make a fuss."

He went over and put his hand on her arm, but she shook it off, dusting the place vigorously, as if his fingers had contaminated her. Then she rose.

"Don't dare to touch me, either of you! I'm going. I don't know where, but anywhere is better than this awful house. It's a good thing I have a sense of humor. I say, Mr. Gridley, you remember when I asked you who was the owner of all this place, and you told me it was a Mrs. Arden, of Boston? Well, what if she should happen to be someone I know very well indeed?"

The couple stared at one another. There was a cold irony in the girl's voice.

"I don't remember mentioning Mrs. Arden's name," faltered Gridley.

"I don't believe you did now. But it doesn't matter. What if Mrs. Arden should turn out to be a very particular friend of mine? It would be very awkward indeed, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, you can't bluff us."

"And it would be still more awkward if I myself should turn out to be Mrs. Arden. Wouldn't it?"

"It would be damned awkward," admitted Calvin Gridley uneasily.

"Then let me tell you my name is not Smith at all. I *am* Mrs. Arden, Mrs. Clive Arden, of Boston. This place and everything on it is my property. That's going it a bit too strong for bluff, isn't it? I have millions behind me. I can not only get this poor fellow cleared but I can put *you* in jail."

"I don't believe you."

"All right. I'll prove it, and jolly soon. And now are you going to order me out of my own house, Mr. Calvin Gridley?"

No answer.

"You don't dare to. You're scared. Well, I was going, but I've changed my mind. There are too many funny jinks going on. I'm interested. I want to see the thing through. Yes, Gridley, I'll stay."

CHAPTER VII

THE GHOST IN THE GROVE

1.

JACK MOON stood like a black shadow in the silence of the grove.

Anxious for the safety of the girl he had followed her part of the way back; now assured that she had gained the house he turned his face towards the solitude of the hills.

Perhaps he would never see her again, never have a chance to explain. But, then, she had promised she would do all she could for him. What that would be, and how long it would take, he knew not. Meantime there were the mountains and freedom.

Well, if they made him an outlaw he would play the part. He would be a scourge to them. Already he had killed, and he would kill again. If he was cornered he would sell his life dearly. He thought of a stanza in the poem he had pasted on his wall—

"I shall not die alone, alone, but kin to all the powers,
As merry as the ancient sun and fighting like the flowers."

As he stood there sullenly, still as the ghostly palms about him, he fingered the knife of the Raratongan. How he would like to drive it home in one of them! But it was not enough. He must have another weapon. Hark! He could hear them. They had discovered his escape. They had awakened the Raratongan, and were kicking him into

lucidity. He could make out the man's protesting howls. Bitterly he laughed. Now the girl was clear he had no fear for himself. Reckless fury flamed in him. If only he had a better weapon he would go back and give battle to the lot. Let them track him to the mountains, let them hunt him down like a wild beast, by the living God, a dozen of their lives should pay the price of his!

And now the sounds had died away. No longer did they belabor the hapless Raratongan. No doubt they were considering a further course of action. Well, there was no object in lingering, though it gave him a grim joy to witness their discomfiture, and to think how close to them he was. The taro patch was like silver in the moonlight, but his way lay in the higher gloom. He plunged into it, climbing up and up to the level of the bench that overlooked the shore flat. When he had reached a commanding point he paused.

What a night! White fire and witchery! In the petrified groves not a living thing stirred! Crash! . . . It was only a falling cocoanut. How tense his nerves were! The night had a crystalline quality of suspense. In that weird white fire it was trance-like, as if all things were unreal, as if he himself were unreal. . . . Ah, the palms! How they loved the moon! Every frond was like polished platinum. They brandished blades like claymores to the sky. The moon fluted them with fairy fire and crowned them with solemn beauty. Resplendently they soared about him, thousands of them. This must be the High Grove, the grove Mowera feared.

For that morning, in the shade of a *purao*, the girl had spun him a curious yarn.

"No one go up there after dark," she said, pointing.

"Why?"

"Plenty ghost. Very bad ghost."

"Ghost! Whose ghost?"

"Ole Captain Barbazo. Him die up there. Now ghost walk all time."

"Who was Captain Barbazo?"

"Plenty bad man. Kill black boy. Catch plenty pearl. Him very rich, plant palm-tree. All time drunk. Kanaka much afraid him."

"So he died up there?"

"Yes, him sick . . . leper. Make cabin up there. Live all alone. By-and-by die."

"Is he buried there?"

"Yes, him daughter, Big Bella, she bury him. All mans too much 'fraid. Now ghost come every night. Plenty mans see, hide face, run away."

"Bah! All imagination."

"No, him ole Captain Barbazo all right. Plenty mans know him. All silver, same leper. Plenty little fire all go about him. Face eat away, same land-crab eat papaw. Him bad ghost. Me plenty 'fraid."

"Ghost be blowed! I tell you what, Mowera: I'll spend the night in your haunted grove. I'll even sleep in the old man's cabin. I'd just like to run up against your specter."

"Oh, no, don't do! You kill me, *I* no go High Grove after dark." At the very thought Mowera shuddered.

2.

And so this was the haunted grove; this the last retreat of Captain Barbazo; those the trees he had planted. Here in the heart of it, when his malady became too horrible for eyes to look upon, he had built a cabin and lived out his evil life. A brutal sea rover of the old school, hated for his cruelty and lust. His daughter had buried him,—Big

Bella Barbazo. Yes, she had dug a grave in front of the cabin and covered him with coral. All alone she had done it, with no other eyes to see.

A queer yarn, yet somehow gripping to the imagination. He was thinking of it as he climbed up through the grove. Perhaps he would meet the specter. In his savage mood he would have welcomed the encounter. He clutched the Raratongan's knife.

"I wouldn't mind driving it into a nice juicy ghost," he muttered viciously. Then he laughed aloud. . . .

What was that? His laughter jarred the silence, but it was echoed in the strangest way. It sounded like the mockery of his laughter. It was a weird, blood-curdling guffaw. Suddenly it ceased, and the silence swept back profoundly. It could not be a parrot because there were no wild parrots here. Strange! Could it be an echo? He would try again. He laughed louder than before, but this time there was no response, only that grim, portentous silence. Curious indeed!

Hullo! there in the center of the grove was the house of the old captain. The moon made a pale mist about it. Here in this cushy glade all was glamor. The broad leaves of the banana plant were like green windows. Above them the varnished fronds of the cocoanut palms gleamed with a poignant brightness; but down in this gulf of greenery the light was chastened, soft, doubly mysterious.

He circled round the cabin, looking at it from every side. It seemed to be solidly constructed of native wood, and, though overgrown by weeds, it still defied the encroachment of the jungle. In front was a gleamy mound —the grave.

As he stood there a curious thought came to him. What if the old corsair were not dead at all? What if this supposed ghost were flesh and blood, and his grave nothing

but a bluff? What if the old man lived and was playing the specter to keep people away? The idea was grotesque, and he put it from him. Yet he was not satisfied. There was some strange mystery about all this.

Thoughtfully he scrutinized the trail that led to the old house. Then he started. It had been used quite recently and by someone. These were human feet that had crushed the fern. No animal this, no spirit.

Hark! again that blood-curdling screech. Despite himself he shuddered. A creepy feeling went up his spine, and he felt his scalp tighten. The sound seemed to come from the edge of the grove. Ah! there he could see . . . something.

Good God! How horrible!

It was closer than he thought, silent now, watching him. It was a tall, gangly form, emaciated, silvered with the luster of the leper. It was naked, but matted hair fell to the shoulders. The head was huge, egg-shaped, glimmering with a pale flame. Face it had none, a crushed-in shadow, a corroded oval with a gash where the mouth might have been, and two black pits of eyes. . . . And the Thing was now moving, was now advancing on him. What beastliness! No, he could not face it. He turned to fly.

And even as he turned it shrieked again. He saw the silver arms go up and something went by him with a whizz. That broke the spell. Spirit or no spirit, he would grapple with it. He whirled round, and leapt towards it, but . . . there was nothing there. Not a sign of any presence, living or dead. Yet, stay! he went back a few paces and stood staring. . . . What was this?

Stuck deeply in the swelling butt of a palm was what seemed to be a shaft of light. He tugged it out. It was

a huge machete. The blade was nearly four feet long. It was pointed like a needle, and it had a razor edge.

He surveyed it grimly. What a narrow escape! The thing would have cleft him like a turnip. He swung it round, making it whistle to the moon.

"Thanks, Captain Barbazo; you've given me the weapon I wanted."

Then, standing there, he quoted some lines from Chesterton's poem:

"Yea, I will bless them as they bend and love them where they lie,
When on the skulls the sword I swing falls shattering from the sky.
The hour when death is like a light and blood is like a rose—
You never loved your friends, my friends, as I shall love my foes."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE ENEMY'S MERCY

1.

FELICITY spent a monotonous morning watching the antics of the land-crabs and speculating on her fate. Only to Mowera, who brought her lunch, did she speak.

"What's the news?"

"Big fellah him get away all right."

"Yes"—ruefully. "I'm the prisoner now. I'm to be taken to Papeete in his place."

"Oh, no, Madame. If he know he come back."

"He mustn't know. Don't you dare tell him, Mowera."

"I don't think I see him. He go plenty long way, I think."

"I hope he's on the other side of the island. Are they hunting him?"

"French policeman he ask boy go forest. Boy no go. Too much 'fraid forest. All time plenty bad ghost. Moorea boy he much scared."

"What's all this about a ghost in the big grove above the house?"

"Yes, him ghost all right. Very bad ghost. Ole Captain Barbazo. Him spirit come every night. Come last night. Make cry very much."

"Who was this Captain Barbazo?"

"Him catchum pearl old time. Him father Mrs. Gridley."

"What!"

"Mrs. Gridley she Bella Barbazo. She marry Mister Gridley. Mister Gridley he come all-same missionary. Marry Mrs. Gridley. No more missionary."

"Oh, that's the way of it. Mrs. Gridley is the daughter of old Captain Barbazo."

"Yah. She half-caste."

"Well, I don't believe in your ghost, anyway. I'd like to see it."

"You go grove to-night. You see him all right."

"There's something queer about this place. Mowera, what makes your master go all the time like this?"

She put her hand up to her mouth as if to stifle a yawn. Mowera gave a startled look, then glanced round in a frightened way.

"Mowera!"

It was the deep, strident voice of Mrs. Gridley.

"What are you wasting your time there for? Have you nothing to do but gossip?"

The girl turned away with the same frightened air.

Felicity pondered. In that house of mystery there were two things that puzzled her. First: Why was Calvin Gridley so strangely dull at moments, and at others so strangely bright? Even now she could see him in the far corner of the veranda in the act of suppressing a yawn. The pallor of his face reminded her of some kind of fungus, and his forked beard hung like moss from it. His lean, yellow hand kept caressing his beard uneasily. At that moment Ironjaw Jones was speaking to him over something to do with the plantation—maybe that shipment of copra to the oil-mill. But though Jones was evidently urging him, Gridley refused to budge from the veranda.

"The man's played out," thought Felicity. "What ever *is* the matter with him?"

The second thing that puzzled her was the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Gridley. Mowera had cast a flicker of light on that matter.

"He hate her; she hate him. He 'fraid her, she 'fraid him. All time watch."

Yes, it was quite evident that Gridley hated his supposed wife, but she had some hold over him. There was a secret between them that kept them together. On account of this they were outwardly civil, when otherwise they would have flown at one another's throats. That was another mystery.

Mrs. Gridley was watching him even now, from the other side of the veranda. She was squatted on the floor with her white Mother Hubbard flopping around her, looking more than ever massive and imposing. Her long, ridge-like face, with its piercing black eyes and bony nose, wore a look of grim malice. On her pudgy hand glimmered a disc of pearl blister as she rolled a pandanus cigarette. She was eternally making them from a sack of leaves she carried, and rarely was one out of her mouth. More than ever she looked like the High Priestess of some obscene temple.

Felicity envied her the cigarettes though. The saturnine Fang had failed to provide her with any more Goldflakes. She had asked Mowera to make her one of the pandanus kind, but it burned morosely, and after using six matches to keep it alight she gave it up.

2.

Heavens! How long the day seemed! She was tired of watching that big land-crab trying to draw a hibiscus blossom down its burrow. She was tempted to talk to those brooding Gridleys, even if it were only for diversion.

But she was saved the overture, for Calvin Gridley himself approached her.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, "while I don't admit for a moment that you *are* Mrs. Arden . . ."

"I don't ask you to admit it. Time enough for that when you hear from Hirst and Blackstone, my agents."

The man looked more uneasy and anxious than ever.

"What I wanted to ask you, merely out of curiosity, was . . . if you were Mrs. Arden, what would you do in the matter?"

"Do! That's very easily answered. If I *were* Mrs. Arden, I would turn you out of here bag and baggage. I shouldn't stand on ceremony I assure you. Pack up! Get!"

He glared at her malevolently, then turning on his heel strode back to his place on the veranda. Mrs. Gridley, who had heard, flashed a venomous look, cold as the gleam of jade. . . .

The long, aimless waiting wearied the girl more than violent exercise would have done. She nodded several times and dozed off. When she started from the last and longest of these doses, the dusk had swooped down. The room was in darkness, and above the palm tufts she could see the purple sky powdered with stars.

"The moon will be an hour later in rising," she thought. "About ten o'oclock. I don't like the darkness."

As she sat there a sense of her helplessness stole over her, chilling her with a vague fear. In the day-time her courage never faltered, but at night . . . those inscrutable shadows, the atmosphere of evil that overhung this house. It was as palpable as the miasma that rose from those crab-corroded mud flats.

When she thought it over, her position was not one to inspire confidence. She was certainly at the mercy of this

sinister couple, who, no doubt, now believed she was what she claimed to be. They were a desperate and unscrupulous pair. She was sure they would stick at nothing. And there was no one to help her if the need came. Not a soul she could turn to. Mowera was her friend, but the girl was in deadly terror of her mistress. There was Fang, the Chinaman; but there was something strange about him too. She did not like his face. It was pock-marked and flat as if someone had ironed down the features. Fang would watch a murder being done and never move a muscle. Then there was Jones and the Raratongan, both in the service of the enemy. The French gendarme was out hunting the prisoner. That was all. On either side of her were miles and miles of uninhabited coast, behind her the ancient mystery of the mountains. Yes, she was truly alone, and very, very helpless.

3.

The house seemed aggressively still. Straining her ears she could not hear a single sound. It was a silence of suspense, of threat, as if dastardly plots were being hatched. Without, she could hear the far-off moaning of the reef, but the grove was as silent as a place shunned and abhorred. She was tempted to go down to the beach to get away from this accursed house, when she heard steps, and saw a light approaching. It was Mrs. Gridley carrying a lamp, while Gridley followed with an imposing-looking document in his hand. The woman put her lamp down on the little table, the man spread the document under it. His manner was calm, but she noted his hand tremble.

"Mrs. Arden, we have decided to believe that you *are* Mrs. Arden."

"Indeed. I'm not asking you to believe anything."

"And to prove the sincerity of our belief we have decided to ask you to sign this little paper."

"May I read it first?"

"Certainly. Read."

She bent over it with a gradually growing frown. Nervously they watched her. At last she raised her head.

"This is a well-drawn-up document, worthy of a lawyer."

"I have been a lawyer, Mrs. Arden."

"Ah! This document seems to be a deed of gift in which Felicity Arden, of Boston, agrees to cede to Calvin Gridley, of Moorea, all right and title to her entire estate in the Island of Moorea. Am I right?"

"That's the gist of it."

"And why, pray, should I put my signature to this?"

"Because . . . we demand it."

"Demand! Indeed. And why do you demand?"

Calvin Gridley again cleared his throat. As he proceeded his voice grew firmer.

"Because, Madame, we consider we have a right to demand it. A moral right. This property was sold for a few bottles of rum and a few sticks of tobacco to a Jew trader by the grandfather of Mrs. Gridley, who was, saving her presence, a drunken old cannibal. The father of Mrs. Gridley, the too-late and unlamented Commodore Barbazo, a rover and pearl pirate, obtained a lease of it and cultivated it during many years. During this time it passed through several hands and was at last bought, for a song, I believe, by your late husband. Its various legal owners knew nothing of it and cared less. To your late husband it was a romantic joke. Meantime we who lived on it worked, cultivated, improved it. We made it the finest property on the island, and worth a hundred times what your husband gave for it. Legally it is yours,

morally it is ours. My wife was born on it. It is our rightful heritage."

"And what about the money *I* have put into it?" cried Felicity; "the thousands of dollars I have been paying you every year for that same maintenance and improvement? Where has it gone, Mr. Gridley? Into your pocket. What of the produce, the tons of copra you shipped, where did its price go? Into your pocket. It seems to me I ought to prosecute you for fraud, only it's my own fault. I've been too neglectful. Remember you are at present simply my employee. You are engaged by me to run this place at a salary of six thousand dollars a year. You have diverted perhaps five times that amount into your own purse. As for your moral right, you yourself would be the first to say business is business. If the boot were on the other foot you would be the first to kick me out."

"We'll leave that side of the matter," said Gridley harshly. "We'll come to another, the sentimental one. We've lived here for years. We've given the place our sweat and blood. We are attached to it by ties of tender association and memory. Would you drive us out of our beloved home, endeared to us by? . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Gridley, please stop. You'll have me weeping in another moment. You're too touching. But it's no use. I believe that if this place were yours to sell, you'd be off to Sydney or San Francisco by the next boat. I'm not a sentimental woman, so that reason doesn't appeal to me. Go on, any more?"

"Yes, as a lawyer, I may tell you that there are flaws in the title. I might dispute it, and, as you know, possession is nine-tenths of the law, and the law here in Tahiti distinctly favors the possessor. Moreover, if we could not resist legally, we should resist by force."

"You forget, Mr. Gridley, that the title has not yet been questioned. Also that I am a rich woman, and that the law everywhere is not insensible to the power of wealth. As to getting you out physically, I'll take my chance on that."

Mrs. Gridley gave a vindictive snort. There was a long silence, then Gridley spoke with a lowered voice and an impressive deliberation.

"There's a last reason why you should sign this deed, Mrs. Arden. And one that may appeal to you more than all the others. As you know, you are here with us—alone. You are in a primitive and savage land cut off completely from all your friends. Do you not realize that anything might happen to you? And in the case of your sudden demise your trustees would no doubt be glad to sell us this place at a nominal price."

She stared at him with widening eyes.

"You mean . . . you threaten me?"

He stroked his beard inscrutably.

"Accidents might happen. You might disappear, get lost in the bush, drowned in the lagoon. There are a dozen things that might occur and no one would suspect us of being concerned in them. Think again, Mrs. Arden. You're going to do something that means ruin to us. Desperate people are dangerous."

"That settles it," she said, with growing anger. "I defy your threats. You think to cow a poor weak woman, but you've met your match this time. Take away your paper. I'll not sign it. Never. . . ."

Slowly he took up the document. He looked at his wife, and there was another long, pregnant silence. Then slowly again he took another paper from his pocket.

"Ha! ha!" he broke out, with a strained laugh. "I was only joking. I congratulate you, Mrs. Arden, on your

spirit. I'll be more reasonable. Now, here's another document I'm sure you won't object to sign. It's simply an ordinary lease, a twenty-year lease, letting us work the plantation at a rental of five hundred dollars a year."

"I'm sorry. But I've already arranged to let someone else run it."

"Well, suppose we say a ten-years' lease at a thousand dollars? That's handsome. As a business woman, you shouldn't hesitate at that."

"Again, I tell you—no. I want the place myself. I've taken a fancy to it. I'm going to build a big house in the High Grove, and live there sometimes."

A house in the High Grove! The Gridleys stared at one another. Then Mrs. Gridley's pent-up fury burst forth.

"Never!" she cried, her teeth clenched, her eyes flaming. "You'll do it over my dead body. It's mine, I tell you, mine. My old father's buried there. Ah! you think you can come here with your money and your airs and trample on us poor people. But I'll choke you first. I'll choke you here with these two hands!"

Gridley pushed her back.

"Keep quiet there," he snarled. Then he went on, and his voice was ominously calm.

"That is your last word? You promise nothing?"

"I promise only that you shall not be prosecuted, and that you shall receive six months' salary on consideration that you leave the island."

"I see. . . . Then there's nothing more to be said."

He turned to his wife. "Take the lamp. Leave her."

They went away as they had come, with the air of conspirators, but at the door he turned once more.

"Your fate be on your own head."

CHAPTER IX

THE CABIN IN THE GROVE

1.

ALONE again in the darkness and stillness of the house the girl's courage slowly oozed away. After all, her defiance had been fifty per cent. bluff; and now, she asked herself, was it worth while to stand out against that evil and implacable pair? Better let Gridley have his lease and get away from this accursed place, with its sense of mystery and undefinable danger. She had almost made up her mind to seek him and come to terms when Fang entered with a flaring candle.

"Me blingee you light."

Even the sight of this ochre-faced Oriental was welcome in her mood of apprehension, so she thanked him heartily.

"Where is Mowera to-night?" she asked.

"Me no savvy. She go. You likee tea I makee."

"Yes, Fang. That's very kind of you."

She drank the tea, but did not enjoy it very much. However, she never did like China tea, and this had a taste all its own. As she reached the bottom of the cup the flavor grew to a distinct bitterness. Then she noticed amid the dregs a brown sediment.

Curious! A thought thrilled her, almost checking the beating of her heart. Poison! But no. So far she did not feel any alarming symptoms. She watched the candle-flame wavering in the breeze from the window. It was attracting all manner of moths and mosquitoes, so she blew

it out. What a wretched fix to be in! She wondered would she get any sleep that night. She rather thought so. Already she began to feel signs of drowsiness. Yonder was the moon, slightly gibbous, just disentangling itself from the palm-tufts. She watched it dreamily. . . .

What was the matter with her? She was dozing off at the window—that would never do. How still the sleeping house seemed! She sat in a ghostly patch of moonlight, but beyond, the shadows were inky black. Yet it seemed to her that from these shadows eyes were watching her, waiting for something. . . . What?

. . . There she was again. She had gone to sleep in her chair. Indeed, she had almost fallen on the floor. Why was she so utterly weary? Well, she must lie down on the bed.

Funny how limp she felt, her feet how heavy. She almost reeled to the bed and collapsed on it. But a thought startled her into wakefulness. Could it be that she was drugged? . . . There it was submerging her again, that wave of drowsiness. She made a great effort. For a moment she raised herself upright, staring at the shadows; then with a last despairing sigh, she fell back and her eyes closed.

2.

Was she awake, or was she in the grip of some hideous nightmare? She tried to scream, but no sound came. She tried to struggle, but she could not move. She could only stare, stiff with horror. For from the darkness two shadows were creeping, were drawing near, were gloating down on her. The moon lighted their faces, so full of beastly triumph, and they were laughing, a chuckling laughter full of venom. The Gridleys.

"Devils! Don't touch me!" she tried to shriek, but no

words issued from her lips. She could only watch them in dumb agony. Now they were binding her hands and feet, and she could only suffer them helplessly. Her strength seemed to have ebbed away. All that remained was a very vague consciousness and a sense of horror.

They were taking her out into the moonlight, carrying her across the clearing, past the taro patch, up into the High Grove. Many times they rested, laying her on the dewy fern, but always toiling on again.

And now they had come to an open place where the palms receded in a circle, and in its center was a tumble-down cabin. They broke their way through a tangle of underbrush to its moldering porch; they carried her into its pungent darkness; they laid her down on its rotting boards. Then the woman spoke.

"You would build a house in the heart of the High Grove. You would make a home where repose the bones of my father. Accursed one! lie there, and may his spirit haunt you, drive you to madness."

So they left her, and the darkness closed in.

3.

Full consciousness was slowly coming back to her, clear consciousness and a terror that grew and grew. There was a door and a window to the cabin. The door was black, but the window was a white square of moonlight that threw a silver oblong on the floor. She could not help watching this window in a fascinated way; for it seemed that something was coming by it, something incredibly beastly.

Then, as if the wild fantasy of her imagination was slowly taking shape, a form embodied itself in that silver square, the form of a silver man. She could not see the face, only a huge head, and a long, emaciated figure half

raised in the window-frame. It was watching her, staring steadily at her. The moonlight fell on its leonine locks, its stark and glistening body.

Now it was up on the window-sill, cowering like a huge ape, still staring as if in amazement. Was it afraid of her, this Thing? No. For now it had dropped into the patch of moonlight, and crouched there. Then it turned its huge face to the light and at last she saw it. . . . Oh, God!

Her scream stifled in her throat. Was greater horror conceivable? It was a human face, yet no ape was ever so frightful. It seemed to glimmer with a pale phosphorescence. The great eyes were wild and staring in their black caverns. Below them was . . . nothing distinguishable: holes that might be a nose, a twisted gash that might be a mouth. Corruption was in that face, and beastliness —everything that was loathsome. Where had she seen something like it? Ah! the leper camp. But this seemed to embody all the other horrors, to be a composite of all the human gargoyles she had seen in the Valley of the Living Dead. And it was coming to her . . . coming . . . yes, gibbering, slavering, in little leaps like a frog it was closing upon her. She could feel a pungent stench, and an icy, grave-like waft of air. Was the Thing human?

Oh! it had leapt. With a scream of maniacal triumph it was on her. Clammy hands seemed to be throttling her. She was choking. Oh. . . . Was this the end?

Suddenly she felt the cold clutch at her throat relax. The Thing had sprung back, was gone. She heard a great shout from the window, a strong voice raised in fury. A man had vaulted into the room and was at her side. He was holding her in his arms. . .

Then, with a moan that went to his heart, she closed her eyes.

4.

He had cut her bonds, but his arms were still about her.

"I heard the scream," said Moon, "and I thought I had trapped the ghost. I've been laying for it. I've an idea it's pretty solid flesh and blood, and I want to get to the root of the mystery. But I thought you were in Papeete by now?"

She told him how the Gridleys had held her back and drugged her. His face grew dark.

"Shall I kill him for you?" he growled. "Shall I tie him to a palm and lash him senseless?"

"No, no. Let us get away from here to safety."

"Are you strong enough?"

"Yes, the thought of escaping from this dreadful place gives me strength."

"All right. When shall we start?"

"Now. We won't lose a moment."

"Come on, then . . . Wait! Did you not hear something?"

"Yes, a noise in the underbrush to the right."

"No, to the left."

"Perhaps it's the ghost again."

Eagerly they listened.

"Quick! Let us go," she whispered.

"*Not so quick.*" The voice came in a whisper from the dark of the doorway. They stared but could see nothing.

"Did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"There's someone there."

He was making a step forward, but she checked him.

"No, don't leave me. Im horribly afraid."

"Come out, whatever you are, man or devil!" he cried.

There was a sudden chuckle and a voice: "A bit of both, I reckon."

Then a figure stepped from the shadow. It was Ironjaw Jones.

"Not much ghost about me. Now, put up yer hands, me lad. You're covered. The jig's up."

"Don't let them get us," moaned the girl. "They mean to kill me."

"All right. Stand back there in the corner. . . . Are you armed, Ironjaw Jones?"

"Yes, Mr. Bloody Beachcomber, I have a pig-sticker in my fist."

"I have nothing. Are you a man? Will you not fight it out man to man?"

"Be God, won't I just! Fightin's me strong suit. Keep out, boys. This is my show. Come on, me bully."

They heard his knife clatter to the floor, then he made a rush. It was rather unfortunate for him. The two came together in the space of light, and there was a crack of bone to bone. It was a bonny blow, the expert blow of the professional fighter. It was a stiff hook with the weight of a powerful man behind it. Crash! Down went Ironjaw Jones as a palm goes down in a cyclone.

But another face had appeared at the window. A hand had reached over the sill, a hand holding a heavy automatic. An arm stretched out till the weapon was pointing blank at Moon's spine. In a moment more the bullet would have broken his back, but the girl had seen the danger. She flung herself on that protruding arm. Its owner struggled to withdraw it; then, with a savage oath, he struck at her, once, twice. Moon turned and saw. With the snarl of a beast he pulled her back, and seizing that arm, he twisted it round, wrist up. Then, bearing down on it, deliberately he broke it over the sill of the window.

With a hideous cry the owner of the arm fell to the ground.

From the black doorway crept a third assailant—the half-breed, Mrs. Gridley. She clutched at the knife that Jones had dropped, and threw herself on the girl. Swiftly Moon darted between them. He captured the woman's wrists, wrestled with her. Shricking like a harridan, she fought savagely. She was Big Bella Barbazo, the blood of a line of head-hunters in her veins. But with a scream of pain she dropped the knife, tripped over the body of Jones, and fell heavily.

"That was a ju-jitsu trick," said Moon grimly. "Come on, now. The window."

They both leapt. The man beneath the window lay still. Moon bent over and took his automatic from him.

"Did you see who he was?"

"No."

"Gridley. Quick! I hear more of them coming. In a moment we'll be surrounded."

From the other end of the clearing a mob of men had burst. They were led by the French gendarme and the Raratongan. Most were Chinamen, a few half-breeds. They were armed with rifles and shotguns.

"Dash for the mountain side," breathed Moon.

But the pursuers had seen them. There was a scattering volley. They both dropped.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. And you?"

"No. Now for a sprint."

They ran their swiftest. This time they made the far grove. Through it they darted, zig-zagging amid the palms. Then they came to the dense cover of the virgin forest, and cowered down in some thick underbrush.

But all sounds of pursuit had ceased. They were safe.

CHAPTER X

THE FLIGHT

1.

THAT night she slept in the fern of the free forest. "Rest well," said Moon. "Nothing shall harm you here."

She lay on a bed of dried leaves with her cheek pillowed on her hair. A little way off he sat, watchful, brooding. It was long after dawn when she awoke.

"Here is the best breakfast I can offer you," he said.

He had managed to find some bananas and oranges, and she ate eagerly. Then she announced:

"There! I'm all hunkydory. Lead on, Jack Moon."

He went ahead, wielding his great, double-handed machete, which he had picked up on escaping from the cabin. It whistled through the air, and a green lane opened before them.

"Where did you get that huge knife?"

"It was a gift," he said grimly.

They made good progress, often stumbling on what seemed to be stretches of an ancient trail.

"It must have been used by the wild cattle," she suggested. "You know, once the island was overrun with them. Have you read *Omoo?*"

"No, I never read novels. I've read Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle.* That's about all I've read on the South Seas."

"I forgot. You're something of a highbrow when it comes to literature."

"I don't care how men write. It's what they think. Are you thirsty?"

"Rather."

He looked up at a tall cocoanut palm, and twisted a cord of sennit around his instep in the way of the natives. Circling the trunk he slowly worked himself up.

"Stand clear," he shouted.

Two green cocoanuts thumped turfward. He descended, hacked off the ends and they quaffed deeply of the nectar. As he drank she watched him admiringly. How the muscles in his legs and arms were alive and leaping! He must be six feet two, she thought, and straight as a dart. She wondered what had gone to his making, what suffering had scored his cheeks and drawn that grim line of his mouth? Suddenly she demanded:

"Jack Moon, are you married?"

He gave an amazed stare. Had she asked if he had ever eaten human flesh he could not have been more astounded.

"Married! No. What would the like of me do with a wife?"

"Worse men seem to have them."

"That's so. There's no man so bad but what some woman lets him make it hell for her. No, I've traveled alone, always will."

He was far from cheerful, but she made up for his lack. Once more she was herself, gay and full of courage. They took up the trail again, and soon they came out on a high point, overlooking a gulf of verdure. Below them was a vast bowl of velvety vegetation; above, a ridge of mountains, incredibly eccentric. Against the sky were grotesque rags and jags of rock; fantastic shreds and splinters; shapes like medieval castles, turrets, bastions, palisades; purple precipices, threaded with cascades of silver. The contrast was violent—those vehement peaks that stabbed the sky; that cushy vale undulating to the sea. The reef swept in two overlapping curves, and,

shielded from the restless ocean, the lagoon dreamed peacefully.

Felicity gazed with rapture. Here was beauty and boldness, grandeur and tenderness. She longed to paint it; then she remembered, and drew back into the glistening glade.

"Aren't you afraid they'll see us? Is there no more danger of pursuit?"

"I guess they have their own worries right now. They wouldn't dare follow us up here."

"What shall we do?"

"Cross the mountain. Get a canoe. Make for Tahiti."

"Do you think we can?"

"If you have the strength and courage—yes."

"I think I have both. Let's get on."

Again they made a meal of oranges and bananas under a mapé tree. Its rich and glossy leaves screened them from the fierce sun. Its roots running along the surface of the ground rose in extraordinary planes. Ropelike creepers clung to it, and the trunk radiated out in the same knife-like planes.

"One wouldn't need a sawmill here," he remarked. "There are planks ready made."

All afternoon they pushed on, and by luck found another semblance of a trail, a green tunnel through which the sunshine filtered. Below them in a deep gully on their right they could hear the innocent murmur of a brook. The trail wound on and up, and soon it was clear that they were coming to the limit of the woodland. Beyond rose the mountain, covered only with a species of thick brush.

"Maybe," said Moon, "we'd better camp here. Tomorrow we'll tackle the ridge. You must be very tired."

"Oh, a little."

"You're wonderful. Hungry?"

"Yes. I wish we'd anything else but fruit, though."

He chose a huge mapé to camp under. The trunk radiated in sections, forming compartments—a sort of natural cloison. The long roots rose partition-like from the surface. By covering one of these sections with branches and the leaves of the giant taro he made a little bower for her, the bottom of which he strewed with dry leaves. Then from the folds of a handkerchief he took some matches and lit a cheerful fire.

"Do you mind remaining alone a bit?" he asked.

"No, it looks so jolly, I'll just crawl in there and doze a little."

She must have dozed more than a little, for when she opened her eyes again he was calling her.

"Sorry to disturb you, but supper's ready."

On a large leaf he put before her something smoking and savory.

"What is it?"

"I went down to the stream thinking maybe I could get fish of some sort. Soon in a pool I saw a big gray eel, so I speared it with my machete. Then I skinned it, cut it up into sections, and cooked it."

"How?"

"I put each piece into the skin of a plantain, wrapped it round with leaves, tied it with fiber, and cooked it in the hot ashes."

"How resourceful you are!"

"A sailor has to be a jack of all trades."

He had roasted some plantains to eat with the fish, so that they made a hearty meal. When it was over he lit his pipe.

"Lucky man! You have tobacco."

"Yes, Mowera gave me some. Perhaps if we found a dry leaf you could make a cigarette."

"I'm dying for one. I got the habit when I lived in the Latin Quarter. Ever been in Paris?"

Paris! What bitter memories the name evoked! He did not reply.

"It's a bad habit," she went on. "But it's comforting. No, I'm afraid we'll never make a cigarette of those leaves. I say, when you've finished your pipe, refill it and let me have a shot."

He did so. She puffed with evident enjoyment.

"This *is* jolly. I wonder women don't smoke pipes. I'll start a woman's pipe club when I get home. It's ever so much nicer than a cigarette."

Suddenly she stopped and handed it back to him.

"I've had enough, thank you."

She was dreamily quiet for awhile. Finally she rose.

"I think I'll take a little stroll."

When she came back she was pale, and she said with a grimace:

"I understand now why women don't smoke pipes. I don't think I want to smoke anything any more as long as I live."

She excused herself, and crawled into her shelter, leaving him sitting by the fire.

He sat there far into the night. It exalted him with joy to think she was so near and that he was watching over her. He was living his great hour. When this brief companionship in adventure was ended he would never see her again. She would go out of his life, this time forever. Well, he would go on adoring her. He had ineffaceable memories, much to be thankful for. And she would never know.

So brooding by the fire in a mood of mingled happiness and pain he saw the dawn come bravely up the sky.

2.

In the dew-drenched dawn the girl awoke. The sun was rising languidly above the sea, and the pale palms waited

for the coming heat. On a leaf outside her shelter were set some oranges and a species of guava. As she ate she wondered where Moon was. She waited for the better part of three hours, growing gradually anxious before he appeared. He looked weary.

"If you're ready," he said, "I've blazed a way to the summit of the ridge. Let's start, for we have a hard day before us."

Indeed it seemed so, for the hill took a sudden pitch. They were toiling up a steep slope that snatched at her breath. The ground was gluey too, and often she had to clutch at shrubs that came away in her hand. They had risen clear of the tree-line, and were going through a close brush sometimes higher than their heads. The air smelled of rotting leaves, and the slippery soil was coated with decayed vegetation. Pricking plants clutched at her, and the webs of spiders continually brushed her face.

Soon under the beams of the rising sun the air grew hot and clammy, while underfoot the humus seemed to exhale a pungent odor. On the surface of the brush all was virescent gleam; below, moisture and rot. It was like a verdant scum covering the mountain. Branches broke off damply, and when she clutched at a low bush it came away weakly. More and more the air became dank and steamy, and panting with their exertions the perspiration streamed down their faces. But at last, after three hours of toiling, all Moorea lay below them.

"Wonderful!" she sighed. "Almost worth the climb. I'd not do it again though for the finest view in the world. And there's more to come."

"Yes, but downhill this time. Courage. See yonder the mountains of Tahiti."

Once more they plunged into that poisonous underwood, threading their way uncertainly, and sometimes pausing on the verge of a sudden chasm. But the humidity was

less overwhelming, and often they would slide down a long slope with only the exertion of checking their descent. Then all at once to their eager ears came the mellow music of a cataract. The trees were drawing near, the mapés, the wild oranges, the solitary, penetrating palms. At last, with a great joy they greeted the friendly forest again, throwing themselves under a mapé, and quenching their thirst with bronzed oranges.

After a brief rest they pushed on. They descended to the bed of a stream and followed it. The light filtered through a leafy screen, and the frequent pools were opal in color, with little black eels swimming on the surface, and great black crawfish darting backwards in the depths. The ridged tree-roots reached sinuously into the water and clutched at the bed of the creek. Tiny brown lizards flirted amethystine tails. Trees grew out of the ground and then grew in again, while great creepers twined like ropes about them. So stumbling and plunging and hacking their way through the tangle they at last gained the valley.

3.

In a fairy-like glade, luminous with the green banners of the banana palm they came on a mere chicken-coop of a hut. At its door a native was sitting, grating cocoanut. The grated nut heaped slowly in the black calabash between his knees. He wore only a *pareu*, but on his head he had a French army helmet. Also his left arm was gone just below the shoulder. He stared at them in sheer amazement.

"From where do you come?" he asked in French.

"From over there," answered Felicity, pointing to the mountains.

"Get a job stevedoring—if they don't put me in jail."

"Rubbish! I tell you you'll do nothing of the kind, and I'm 'She who must be obeyed.' Remember I give you my cocoanut ranch."

"I'm afraid I couldn't take it."

"Don't be so precious proud. For the moment we'll say nothing about 'giving.' But you'll manage it for me, won't you? You'll help me in that?"

"I'll help you in anything."

"Good. You are duly appointed Manager of my Moorea estate, successor to Calvin Gridley."

"If you wish it I'll do my best."

"And the salary it carries is six thousand dollars a year."

"I couldn't take that."

"Well, seeing you're a beginner, suppose we start you at—say, five thousand five hundred."

"You are laughing at me."

"No, sir. I never was more serious. When I say a thing I mean it. Luckily, being rich I can gratify most of my whims. Better still, I can help my friends."

"For that alone it's good to be rich," he said.

"Yes. Now listen to me. As soon as we get ashore I'll pay you an advance on your salary, and you'll get clothes, white linen, silk if you can—the very best Papeete affords. Then you'll shave off that horrid beard and spruce up. After that we'll go to the American Consul and enlist his aid and sympathy. Finally, I'll let you take me out to dinner and afterwards to the theater. That is, if you like. . . . You don't look at all pleased. Don't you want to sacrifice your precious beard? One would think it was a disguise."

He bent to the paddle so that she could not see his face.

"I'll take it off if you wish," he said after a moment.

"All right. Oh, I'll make you look like a fine gentleman when I've done. I'll be proud of you, Jack Moon."

For a time they paddled steadily through a blue and glittering sea. Then Felicity spoke again.

"You must be dreadfully hot in that shirt. Why don't you take it off?"

She saw a flush on his neck, even through his tan.

"I'd like to," he admitted. "But I didn't like to suggest it."

"Oh, don't mind me. Remember I studied at Julien's and painted from the nude. Then, again, I trained as a nurse during the war. By the way, were you in the war?"

"No."

"I'm surprised. You missed a great experience. Where were you?"

He might have answered truthfully: "In jail." But he merely mumbled: "Force of circumstances prevented me."

"Well, take your shirt off if you want to. I'm neither a modest daisy nor a blushing rose. Besides, I've been married."

He turned with a start, staring at her.

"Didn't you know that?" she asked with surprise.

"No, I thought . . ."

"You thought I was a bold, bad spinster. I'm not. I'm a widow. Not a very merry one, though . . ."

She was silent a while, during which he digested her announcement. Then she went on: "My husband was an aviator, one of the first to lose his life. . . . Anyway, you don't need to be bashful about taking off your shirt. Besides, we see the natives all around us with next to nothing on. Besides, again, I was going to ask you to pose for me in a *pareu*. I will, too."

He drew off the shirt and continued to paddle. She admired the play of muscle that rippled with every stroke.

"You know, you're a beautiful man. There's a splendid spread to your shoulders, yet they slope so wonderfully."

He ceased paddling. "Oh, please leave off. You're making me embarrassed. I'll have to put on my shirt again."

"All right; I'll stop. My admiration was purely professional. I've been at prize-fights and seen champions stripped to the waist, yet none of them had a finer back than you. You would have made a good prize-fighter."

"Would I?"

They were paddling over a wonderful sea. Every moment flying-fish rose like grouse in a cover and whizzed away from them. The water was a blue plain with a pleasant ripple that helped them on.

"It's a friendly little breeze," commented Moon. "Pity we couldn't take advantage of it."

"Yes. Oh, for a sail, a sail. I haven't even a pocket handkerchief."

His eyes fell on his discarded shirt. He ripped up the side-seam so that it made one spread. He lashed his paddle to the bow and fastened the shirt to it. It bellied tightly. He felt the pull of it.

"There! that will help us along a bit. If this breeze holds we might make Papeete before midnight."

"Then I may sleep under my own mosquito-curtain?"

"I fear not. We couldn't find the opening in the reef after dark. We'd better take things easy."

They lunched happily. They enjoyed the hard, crisp biscuit, and quenched their thirst with oranges. Then he took her place in the stern and paddled steadily. Another three hours passed. She felt drowsy in the heat and dozed a little. When she awoke she looked round eagerly.

"See!" she exclaimed, "Moorea is dim now, while Tahiti grows clearer. We must be more than half-way."

"Yes, and by the sun it's about five o'clock. We are doing gloriously."

With the rhythm of a machine he swayed at the paddle, and the little sail continued to pull. The sun sank behind Moorea, while through the purple haze they could see twinkling lights—Papeete. In the softly darkling sky the stars were tremulous and the breeze a soft caress.

"You'd better lie down now and get some sleep," he suggested.

"I'll try if you like, but I don't think I can sleep."

She lay in the bow with closed eyes, while he continued to paddle through the starlit waters.

How happy he was! If he could just serve her, that was all he asked. He would be content to do so all his life. If he ran the place over there he would always be in touch with her, and perhaps sometimes she would visit it. Ah! if only it would all end like that, how good it would seem! Could it be that at last misfortune had ceased to hound him?

How strange to be on the wide sea alone with her! She was sleeping like a tired child. She must have faith in him. Here they were, floating on a slim log hollowed out a little, an inch or so of vegetable fiber between them and death. Poised over a vast world full of terror and mystery, they felt no fear.

How clear the lights of Papeete were growing! An idea came to him. When the moon rose perhaps he might get through the opening into the harbor. If he only could, what a surprise for her! He would wake her and tell her she was home. It was worth trying. Powerfully he bent to the paddle.

Lord! how happy he was!

CHAPTER XII

THE SQUALL

FOR some time the wind had fallen; the air was sticky; the sea a glassy calm. It was like paddling over a stagnant pond. It seemed as if he could not get his breath.

Once he paused to wipe away the sweat that beaded his brow. He felt an extraordinary sense of fatigue; but that was not strange. Well, in an hour, maybe less, they should be close to Papeete.

What was that tar-black cloud to the north? With some anxiety he watched it. It was blotting out the stars, and it was rising. Even as he looked he saw more stars quenched. Now it was mounting even more swiftly. Half the heaven was cowled. He saw star after star twinkle, tumble out of sight. His face was grimly set, and, as he looked towards the girl, he drew a deep, hissing breath. Too well he knew what it portended.

Suddenly from the belly of the cloud a great lance of flame stabbed seaward—so near it seemed it almost blinded him. At the same moment there was a crash as of mountains being rent asunder.

"What is it?" cried the girl, starting awake.

"A squall, I'm afraid."

As if it cringed in terror the sea was strangely flat around them. They could hear the on-coming wind, a sinister whistling, growing louder, louder.

"Take down the sail," he cried.

She fumbled at the lashings, but even as she did so the wind was on her. It twisted the rag-wrapped paddle from her hand and whirled it into the night. Down she sank to the bottom of the canoe, cowering in fear.

All the stars had gone now. The sky was a sooty pall, the sea inky immensity. Darkness blotted them from each other. A pause of suspense, of dread.

Then the rain. It came in flurries, a quick succession of flapping sheets that smacked their boat and ran over them in streams. It had the force of a cataract, and the black sea boiled with it.

"Lie down!" he shouted; but she could hear nothing. The wind was screaming above her. If she raised her head it was like sheets of metal beating on her ears. She crouched low, shivering with terror.

A great mountain of water was sweeping down. They could not see it, but they felt themselves rising. White waves breached over them, yet still they climbed. Then at the summit the full force of the wind smote them, and for a moment it was as if their canoe would be lifted clean out of the sea. But it was too waterlogged for that, and as they lay flat the wind streamed over them with the pressure of a mill-race. Then again they sank into a seething pit of foam. The sea rolled in hills and valleys, and always over them screamed that metallic wind.

He reached forward to where she lay. His fingers met her cold, wet hand, and he felt its sudden clutch. Her voice was in his ear.

"Oh, I'm so glad! I thought you'd gone—blown away. Thank God you're here!"

He tried to comfort her. "Don't be afraid. It can't harm us. Nothing can sink this canoe."

"Is there really no danger?"

"None, so long as we remain at sea. We were well out

when it struck us. It's driving us south. Already it's calming some."

And indeed the seas seemed less stupendous, though the wind was terrific. From out of the black immensity it was shrilling in insane fury, tearing up the peaks of the tossing waters and throwing them in sheets into the air.

"There's a calabash near you," he cried again. "If you can reach it I'll bale a bit."

This kept him busy, and reassured her somewhat. So passed an hour. Then again he felt her lips at his ear.

"Do you think it's gone down any?"

"I'm sure of it. By dawn we'll be somewhere off the peninsula, and we can make a landing."

But if the seas had gone down, the wind was as violent as ever, driving them on, they knew not where.

"Do you mind if I hold your hand?" she cried. "Then I'm not so afraid."

Again she clutched it in that convulsive way, lying face down, as if to shut out the fury that raged overhead. Another hour passed.

"Look!" he said suddenly, "the sky's clearing."

The black cloud was lifting as fast as it had risen. They were conscious of a growing radiance.

"The moon!"

It was now nearly four hours since the squall had struck them, and the moon in its third quarter was high in the sky. It revealed the foam-marbled water that hissed past them, and though the wind was still shrilling in their ears they might now venture to raise their heads.

"Look! Look! Land!" she cried.

He, too, had seen it. His breath hissed between his clenched teeth.

"What I feared most," he muttered. "The wind's driving us right on."

Already they could hear the growl of the reef, already see the gleam of its fangs. In the gusty moonlight it seemed to rear and roar at them. He seized the paddle and swung round the head of the canoe. Then, churning water furiously, he tried to make headway against the wind.

"Oh, I wish I could help you!" she moaned.

Desperately he was straining to hold his own. The paddle bent under his powerful strokes. They were almost stationary. . . . Now they even seemed to be gaining a little. If he could keep on till the wind went down they might yet be saved. . . .

But it was terrible work. With agony she watched him. If she could only aid! She knew he was making the fight of his life, and she could do nothing but look on. Oh, that relentless wind! It seemed to grudge them an inch, bent on their destruction. But he would beat it—ay, he would beat it yet.

Crack! The paddle had broken just above the blade. He flung it from him.

"Quick!" he cried. "The other one."

"There is no other," she wailed.

He had forgotten. It had gone over with the sail. He turned, and his face was strangely pitying.

"What can we do?" she gasped.

"Nothing. . . . Face death bravely."

She drew a long, shuddering breath. The canoe had swung round and was racing anew for the reef. He crawled forward to her side. She was surprised by the tense emotion of his voice.

He caught her hand and bent down so that he could speak in her ear.

"It doesn't matter what I say now, does it?"

"Why?"

"Because it will likely be the last words I'll ever say. . . . I love you."

He raised her hand and kissed it.

"I never would have told you, but nothing matters now. I have loved you from the first day I saw you, and if I'd lived to be a hundred I'd have loved you to the last."

Wide-eyed, she looked up at him.

"I'm glad you told me. It . . . helps. . . ."

Side by side they stared at the growing terror of the reef. In the moon-glaze the surf reared like a white wall. Its roar mingled with the screaming of the wind. In the gusty emptiness the moon seemed to laugh at them. He put an arm round her, and she closed her eyes. She was feeling his lips on her brow. Softly she murmured a prayer. . . .

There together they waited for death.

Then a wonderful thing happened, a very miracle. For as they drove on, it seemed that the foam barrier gave way before them, melted into black water, an eddy, a tide-rip. Swift as an arrow they shot into a strange serenity and peace.

He was still holding her in his arms. She had swooned, but in a little she opened her eyes wonderingly. Above her were palm-tufts swishing under a gibbous moon.

"Where are we?" she whispered.

"Safe. We have gone through a gap in the reef."

She closed her eyes deliciously. Soon they drifted in, for the lagoon was narrow at that place. When they struck the shore, he leaped out, carrying her in his arms. Gently on a grassy bank he put her down, but her arms were about his neck, and she clung tightly.

"What was that you said about loving me?"

"I shouldn't have said it."

"Say it again."

"I can't . . . now."

"Kiss me."

He bent down, and she held him closely. A strange reaction had come over her, a half-hysterical joy. Perhaps it was the danger she had come through, perhaps the loneliness of the scene about her, perhaps a compelling force in the strong man who held her in his arms, but the primitive woman awoke in her.

"Oh, Jack Moon!" she whispered in a kind of ecstasy. "Kiss me again."

Their lips met and he felt the answering fire of her veins. She drew him closer, closer, so that her face was hidden; she grew suddenly limp.

Passionately he raised her face. It was very white in the moonlight, and her eyes were closed. . . .

Then as he looked he shuddered violently, letting her slip to the ground.

"Ah no!" he cried with anguish.

For even as he gazed he seemed to see another face, that of an old man with blood-clotted brow, and wide, empty stare. Masking his eyes with his hands, as if to shut out a hideous vision, he turned and fled wildly into the night.

BOOK IV.—THE PLAYGROUND OF PASSION

CHAPTER I

TRAMPS

1.

"HAVE you any idea where we are?" asked Felicity.

"No, but I suppose, by the size of the mountains, we're on Tahiti."

"Isn't it strange! Here we are sitting on a bit of beach where the storm has so kindly deposited us, and we don't know where. We might even be in Raratonga."

Her mood was wildly whimsical. She went on:

"Yes, behold us two, bits of human wreckage thrown up by the tempest. Look how it has strewn other wreckage all about us. The beach is covered with cocoanuts and broken branches. Out there, beyond the reef, the sea is gnashing its teeth, foaming with rage because it could not get us. See how the wind is still worrying the palms, cuffing the poor things as if they hadn't been chastised enough. And here we sit and laugh at them, for we're safe, safe. Safety has become a positive joy to us."

She stamped the solid land exultantly; she flung her arms round a slender gray palm, and laid her cheek lovingly against its ringed bark. She went a little way to where a hibiscus bush flaunted its snowy blossoms. She plucked one.

"Which ear should I put it behind? The left means, I am seeking a lover; the right, I have found one. Or is it the other way about? To make sure, I will put one behind both ears."

She looked at him provokingly, her head held high, her tawny hair hanging over her shoulders.

"Jack Moon, you're a sight. I don't know if you're quite respectable without a shirt; but man! you're fine. I'm afraid of those great arms, afraid you might seize me and crush me."

"You've no need to be," he answered quietly.

Struck by something in his tone, she gave him a long, curious look.

"See here," she said; "you know how straightforward I am. I don't beat about the bush. I want to ask you —did I forget myself a little last night?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean . . . did I try—as friend Calvin would say—to vamp you? Seems to me I have a vague recollection of kisses . . . and so on. Was it? Or did I dream?"

"You must have been dreaming," said Moon shortly.

"Strange. It seems so vivid. Well, it was a very nice dream. So nothing really happened?"

"Nothing."

"Then I must try to forget my dream. You know, Jack Moon, you're a funny man. You're as shy as a young boy. Yes, I'm sure now you didn't kiss me last night. I wonder . . ."

"Well?"

"I wonder did you ever kiss anyone else? Did you ever kiss a woman in your life?"

"Never."

"You mean to tell me your lips are virgin?"

"I do."

"What about that pretty girl I once saw in your cabin? Didn't you?"

"No," very gruffly.

"How extraordinary! I believe you, you know, but you

make me feel—well, like a mother to you. I didn't want to feel that way exactly. . . . Come! On with the adventure. Let us explore this terra-incognita. Only I'm devilish hungry. Even a fallen mango would fill me with joy. Let us proceed, my friend."

2.

The reluctant sun had risen, and the fronds of the palms were like slashing cutlass blades. In glistening splendor rose the hillside; a mass of luxuriant greenery, yet all clarity and detail.

"Which direction shall we take?" she asked. "It doesn't seem to matter. Don't you love that 'doesn't matter' feeling?"

To the right, as they looked landward, the shore rose in barren solitudes; to the left were emerald hills sloping suavely to the sea.

"Let's go that way," she pointed. "Lead me to a banana grove or I'll drop. The other way the reef ceases, the palms cease, all prospect of breakfast ceases."

So they took the leftward way and struck out hopefully. Every little while the hills opened in winding valleys of bosky green, and a river came brawling down from the violet mountains. There seemed no end of these rivers. Some were quite small, others broad and deep. Every hundred yards or so they had to wade one. The girl sloshed from one river to another, the water squirting from her sneakers. Her feet came to have a parboiled aspect, her ankles swelled visibly.

"Looks as if I had incipient 'fay-fay,'" she said, regarding them with concern. "You know, I love that word 'fay-fay.' It seems such a frivolous and saucy word to describe a repellent disease. It takes away half its horror.

Actually, we've gone a hundred yards and not another river. Perhaps they've finished."

"Don't speak too soon. They're concentrating. When we do come on one it will be all the bigger. There now!"

It was, indeed, a broad and brimming stream. Dubiously they looked at it. Here surely was a case of having to swim. Then, as they were hesitating, a pirogue shot out from the opposite bank. So opportune was its appearance, it seemed as if it had been waiting there on purpose. It was propelled by a smiling boy, who bade them embark, and paddled them across. When they explained that they had nothing to give him he shook his head almost indignantly.

A little farther on, they came to their first hut. It was a tiny board shack, raised on coral pillars about four feet high. On the balcony a man was sitting, strumming plaintively on a guitar. He wore a loin-cloth only, and his head was wreathed with flowers. Awkwardly he arose; then they saw that though the rest of his body was bony almost as a skeleton his legs were monstrously swollen with elephantiasis.

The boy of the pirogue had followed them. When they made signs that they were hungry the man spoke to the boy, who brought them fresh bananas, a pineapple, oranges, and green cocoanuts.

As they ate sitting on the balcony, their host regarded them with smiling eyes. There was no trace of sickness in his clear gaze. He was all courtesy, a natural gentleman. To have offered him money would have marred the graciousness of the gesture. For the joy of giving seems precious to these people, and if kindness be one of the greater virtues, they atone by it for their laxity in other ways.

Truly it was a land of little rivers. As Felicity gazed

from verduous valleys to mountains seamed with cataracts, she quoted aloud:

"And land of streams! some like a downward smoke,
Slow dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below. . . ."

"Tennyson, isn't it?" asked Moon.

"Ah!" she said, surprised. "You know it?"

"I don't often read poetry. To me it's fancy ink-slinging. I know *Ulysses* by heart, though. That's a brave poem."

Yes, they had come again to a Lotus Land, where all things always seemed the same. In every glade were smiling natives, golden skinned and *pareu* girt. In indolence and ease they spent their lives. Their joy at the sight of lonely and pedestrian whites was unbounded. With cries of delight they greeted the strangers, seeking to bind them with chains of flowers, entreating them to rest awhile. But Felicity wanted to push on.

"I believe we're in Tahiti, after all," she said. "The vision of my little bungalow begins to grow vivid. My feet are weary, but my heart is stout. On to Papeete!"

She was in her gayest spirits, and mocked at fatigue. They waded more rivers; they plunged into the coolness of groves; they passed the mouths of smiling valleys. The sun beat down relentlessly, and every patch of shade was welcome. Suddenly she paused in the middle of a stream.

"Jack Moon, I'm thirsty again. But, though I stand knee-deep in crystal water—do I drink it? No, nothing so plebeian."

She waded out, and, signaling to a native boy, she pointed to a spreading cocoanut tree. He needed no second bidding. He simply walked up that tree, bracing himself

outward with his arms, and gripping with the flat of his feet. Thump! Thump! Two cocoanuts thudded to the ground.

He descended, and with a machete chopped at the green rind. The white chips flew off beneath the swinging blade. He gave a dexterous twist with the point of his knife, and there was an outspurt of juice. Then he handed her what seemed a huge goblet of emerald and ivory, and, looking into its enameled depths, she saw a liquor clear as crystal. Tilting it up, she drank and drank. To her eager thirst it was nectar.

And so they went on through a land of abundance. On the flat between the beach and the mountains were endless groves of cocoanuts. By the roadside were bread-fruit and mango trees. Every few hundred yards were little houses with naked children and *pareu*-clad women. There were taro patches and banana groves, churches and Chinese stores. The road was lined with hedges of hibiscus, pink, scarlet, and white, that mingled with the gold and crimson of croton vines. On the porch of a huge *himine* house a score of girls were scrubbing. Their cotton dresses were tucked between their thighs, and their shapely legs bare. Merrily they pointed one to another. Then looking at Moon, "*Vahine!*" they cried, and laughed like wanton children. But again the way grew wild, and in the midst of a lonely stretch the girl gave a sudden cry.

"What is it?" he asked.

"My knee. It's given out. I've been fearing it would. I'm afraid we'll have to seek some shelter for the night."

"I'm sorry. I'll go ahead and see if there's a house near."

He came back to say that all he could find was a small shed for drying copra a few hundred yards farther on.

"Righto! I'd rather sleep there than in the hut of a native. I expect I can hobble that far."

But he bent down and lifted her as he would a child.

"Oh! Are you sure I'm not too heavy?"

"No, I could carry you all around the island."

"You're improving, Jack Moon. But what island? Tahiti? Why, we don't even know if we're on Tahiti. Isn't it silly? We never thought of asking. Or was it that we wanted to keep up the illusion that we dunno where we are? If you hadn't that horrid beard, I believe I'd kiss you. If you shave it off I promise you I will."

He made her a pillow of wild cotton and brought her some banana-leaves, with which they covered themselves.

"There now," she said. "We look just like the Babes in the Wood. But I hope there's no such sad fate in store for us. Anyway, I'm going to sleep like a babe. So good-night, Jack Moon."

"Good-night, lady. I think I'll sleep soundly, too."

Indeed, he slept so soundly that he did not see five men come out of the grove on their way to the beach. The sun was just rising.

The first of the men stopped, grunted an oath, called the others. All five stared, cursed silently. Then the biggest of them, licking his lips with unction, drew forth a big Mauser and cocked it. He bent over the sleeping man.

"Rouse up, there, ye son of a biscuit! Blast ye! Open yer blinkin' eyes!"

So Moon opened his eyes, to find himself gazing into a black muzzle and behind it the grinning face of Macara.

CHAPTER II

MACARA'S TRIUMPH

BAD MARC had not improved in beauty. There was a wide gap in his tobacco-stained teeth through which the nicotine juice trickled in a rusty rivulet. His eyes, inflamed by recent orgy, leered with cruelty and spite. His face had the pallor of long debauch, and his hand on the pistol jerked alarmingly.

"Now then, me gentleman, we've got ye dead to rights. Up wid yer bloody mitts, damn ye! Smeet, nip back to camp an' git that coil o' half-inch rope. Quick!"

The ex-jockey was off at a run. The five men seemed to be in the last stages of a wild revel. All were pale, twitchy, unwashed.

Macara went on: "Say now, who's the moll ye've got along? Some tasty bit o' skirt, eh, Windy? You bein' the ladies' man o' the gang, we'll leave her in your hands fur the moment. Be gentle wid her, Bill."

Windy lurched towards Felicity. He put out a filthy paw, from which she shrank with a shudder. He blinked at her with bloodshot eyes, then pushed his face into hers. Unable to control her aversion, she struck at it fiercely.

"Ha! ha!" roared Macara. "Did ye see that, Hank? That's one for you, Windy. The spunky little devil!"

Here Smeet returned with the rope. While Windy nursed his jaw and glowered at the girl, the others trussed up Moon. They did so with the joy of artists. They lashed his hands behind his back till the strands bit into his wrists. They cinched his elbows till his shoulder-

blades cracked. Finally they wound the rope round and round his body, and their knots were the knots of sailormen. By no efforts could he have freed himself.

"Come on, me lads. Back to camp. Windy, give yer arm to the lady, will ye? But she don't seem to favor you. I'm thinkin' it's me she's after. Let Hank and the Dutchman heft her along."

In single file they went up a narrow trail till they came to a clear space. At one time it had been a charcoal-burner's camp, but was now overgrown with coarse grass. There was a tent, a smoldering fire, a felled ironwood tree, and several rum demijohns.

"Say, this is a pleasant surprise," said Macara, surveying his captives with that gap-toothed grin. "Excuse me not puttin' up a banner of welcome. Ye see we didn't know ye was comin'. But now seein' as yer here ye must take us as ye find us, rough and ready, eh? 'Specially rough."

With that he struck Moon a savage blow on the face. Then he snarled in sudden fury: "Ye pie-faced barstud! See that front tooth ye near knocked down me throat? Well, I don't hold wid them that says a tooth fur a tooth. Naw, gimme a dozen fur one, that's my motter. So fur this one ye cost me, I'm goin' to cave in all yer top jaw—jest hammer 'em in wid an ax-head, see! Oh, ye'll be the beauty when I gets troo wid ye, me pretty lad. . . . Hullo, there, little lady! Makin' eyes at me, are ye? 'Ere, give us a kiss."

The brown spittle trickled from the gap in his teeth and irrigated the stubble of his chin. When she saw that face thrust into hers, the girl dealt another blow.

"Ha! ha!" shrieked Windy. "She got ye there, Marc. Some little love-tap!"

"All right," said Macara. "Lots o' time. Ye'll give

me heaps o' kisses before I'm troo wid ye. Ye'll be beggin' fur 'em. Ye'll be crawlin' on yer knees afore me an' lickin' me feet. Oh, I'll attend to your case pretty soon. But there's somethin' more interestin' on hand. Our friend here wid his black looks. . . . G-r-r-r! I'll give ye somethin' to scowl for, me gentleman."

Again he struck savagely. Moon went to the ground, blood streaming down his face.

"Now, what to do wid ye, that's the question," Macara reflected. "Give us one of yer pimp-sticks, Smeet. . . . What to do with 'im? . . ." He lit the cigarette Smeet handed him. Suddenly his eyes glowed. There was in them the primitive savagery of the small boy who tears the wings and legs from a fly.

"Say, Smeet, we got lots o' rope, hain't we?"

" 'Bout a hundred feet inch-rope."

"Guess that'll do. Well now, you, Windy, shin up that palm and take a hitch round the top. Fasten it good."

Windy didn't like the job. True, the palm was only a young one and not very hard to climb, but just then he was not in palm-climbing form. However, persuaded by Macara's threatening scowl, and urged by a certain curiosity, he succeeded in securing the end of the rope round the palm just below the tuft. Then he half slid, half tumbled to the ground.

Macara took up the ax with which they had felled the ironwood tree. He chopped the rope through just short of where it reached the ground. Carefully he turned and measured the distance to another young palm.

"Smeet, your turn now. Swarm up an' make a safe hitch round that one."

Smeet went up like a monkey. A rope dangled from the second palm.

The tree they had felled was unusually heavy. Macara

selected a very stout limb that forked near the butt. Its end had splintered in falling and dug deeply into the ground. He brought the slack of the nearest rope round this limb.

"Come on, boys, all pull," he cried.

With their combined efforts the palm arched over.

"Pull harder!"

The palm was bent almost like a bow.

"That'll do. Take a timber-hitch and make it tight. . . . Good! She holds. Now for the other rope."

They swung down the second palm in the same way. When it curved over like a tense spring, they secured it to the same limb.

"Now lift this stiff up an' lay him acrost the trunk. . . . Right! Take the free ends o' the rope an' make his feet fast, an end to each ankle. Fasten them well—a double hitch and a bowline. . . . There! I guess we're all fixed. Now, boys, you see the idee. I takes the ax. I chops through that there limb. . . . I'm curious to see what happens then—darned curious! Of course, them palms will try to whip back into place. The strain on them's something fierce. But can they? That's what interests me. There's this here guy strung between 'em by his legs. Them palms is goin' to try to get back to the perpendicular. Again I asks you, boys: Can they? Them ropes ain't any too long, and this guy is straddled between 'em. There'll be a heluva jerk. Something's got to give. What's it goin' to be—them palms, that rope, this guy? Thet's what's interestin' me, boys; what's goin' to happen when I chop this here limb."

They stood open-mouthed. The girl suddenly dropped to the ground. She hid her face from the horror that already in imagination she saw. Then frantically she began to scream for aid.

"Quit that squallin'!" said Macara savagely. "You hit me one on the jaw. Here's where you pay, you hell-cat. Lift her up, boys. She don't want to miss this show. Take what's left o' the rope. Tie her to that palm."

They raised her, half fainting, and bound her to the trunk.

"There!" said Macara. "Ye've got a front seat at the circus. Ye won't miss anythin'."

He swung the ax once or twice, notching the limb delicately. He was enjoying this scene of his making, wanting to prolong it. In his way, he was an artist. He looked evilly down at the prisoner, then he thought of a torture still more exquisite.

"Say, partner," he sneered, "where did ye pick up that bit o' muslin, anyway? Whose home was ye robbin'? She don't look like a half-breed neither. Some little cutie from the back blocks. Well, we'll all sample yer taste afore we've done, me bully boy."

Moon raised his head and looked steadily at the man.

"Do what you like with me," he said in a tense voice; "but if you harm her, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth and kill you like a dog!"

Macara cackled. "I guess ye won't feel like followin' a lame duck when them two palms gets troo wid you. You may be a whale of a man, but I reckon them sticks is goin' to rip ye right in two. I've no doubt ye'd do just as ye say if ye had the chance, but ye won't have no chance. Say, boys, me first wid the girl."

"Naw," said Windy, "that ain't fair, Boss. When you get through with anything, there ain't much left for anyone else. Let's gamble for the girl."

"All right," agreed Macara. "I ain't so crazy 'bout women's you. Ruther hev' a bottle than a wench any day.

Get out the deck an' we'll draw for her. Ace high. Highest man gets her."

Smeet produced a dirty pack, shuffled them, presented them to each man, who took a card. Macara threw his down with a curse.

"A two spot."

Windy was exultant.

"An ace!"

But Dirty Hank also produced an ace, so the two were obliged to draw again. This time Hank won.

"There ye are, Dirty, there's yer prize."

Hank was rubbing his hands together. His eyes glistened. He licked his lips like a hungry hyena. Then he threw his arms round her and pressed his face like a bit of filthy carrion into hers.

She screamed . . . screamed. Moon was struggling like a madman in the cutting cords. The evil genius of the scene, Macara, stood poised over him, his ax raised on high.

"Give us a kiss, me darlint," leered Dirty Hank. "Kiss yer honey-boy."

"Stop yer squawkin', ye b——!" snarled Macara. "Cut out that squealin', or down comes this ax."

The girl stopped suddenly. Her eyes dilated with horror as she saw the gleaming ax poised over the limb.

"Give 'im his kiss, or whack! Bang goes the whole show. Be still now."

No sound came from her lips. Once more Dirty Hank had her in his arms, but her eyes were fixed, fixed on that gleaming blade. . . .

Then an incisive voice seemed to cut through the silence.

"What devil's work is this?" it said.

CHAPTER III

THE RESCUE

THREE men had emerged from the bush. They were dressed like natives, with *pareus* round their waists. Their bodies were a beautiful golden brown, their faces richly tanned. Exercise and freedom from clothes had developed them finely, and they held themselves with the proud poise of the natives.

But they were plainly white men. The one who had spoken was long and lean. He had the abbreviated mustache of the soldier, and the staccato style of one used to command. Behind him was a tall young fellow with handsome features, glossy black hair, flashing black eyes. The third was rather stocky. He had a round, cheerful face, spectacles, and a mop of curly hair. The first two carried rifles, the spectacled one had a short machete.

The man with the military manner seemed to take in the scene at a glance.

"Here, you fellow!" he snapped explosively. "What the devil are you doing to that woman? Devine, attend to that chap."

But the tall youth was already busy. He let Dirty Hank have a smashing right between the eyes, then a left to the jaw. Hank went down.

"If you stir I'll drop my rifle-butt on your face, you dog!" said the tall youth, putting his foot on Hank's chest.

"Aubrey," barked the leader again, "cut the rope round the woman. This chap on the ground, too. Free them."

The spectacled man was quick. With one slash he released the girl; two more and Moon leapt to his feet.

It all passed in a moment. Taken by surprise, Smeet,

Windy, and the Dutchman could only stare and gape. Macara still stood with his ax poised.

"Here, my man, drop that quick. I've got you covered. I shoot from the hip."

Macara flung the ax from him. At the same instant there was a piercing shriek. Felicity had fallen forward in a swoon.

That broke the spell. In a flash the three beachcombers had dived like rabbits into the bush. The dark youth wheeled round to catch the falling girl, and Dirty Hank was up and away. Then, seeing his chance, Macara braved a shot from the man with the rifle, and he, too, plunged into the cover. In a twinkling all five had vanished.

But it was Moon who caught Felicity. The others bent over her, full of sympathy. Yet they were plainly puzzled.

"Poor thing!" said the tall young man. "Who is she?"

"An American lady," said Moon.

"A lady!"

"Yes. Traveling. Came on the last boat."

They looked more sympathetic than ever.

"It's all right," said the spectacled man. "I'm a bit of a doctor, you know. It will pass in a little. It was the rush of blood from the head when the ropes were cut so suddenly."

In a dazed way Felicity looked up. The man with the military air knelt down and took her hand.

"Don't be afraid, Madame," he said gently. "You're among friends. You're quite safe."

"Are you feeling better?" asked the man with the spectacles, taking her other hand.

"Oh . . . yes. I'm . . . all right now. . . . Sudden dizziness. . . . Foolish of me. . . . So sorry to give you trouble. I'll get up, thank you."

Moon assisted her to rise.

"I should introduce myself," said the man with the crisp manner. My name is Hillcrest—Guy Hillcrest, late Major in the British Army, now vanilla-planter on this island. These are my friends who are staying with me—Tom Devine, of New York, a painter chap, and Philip Aubrey, of San Francisco, a writer chap."

The two bowed as if in a drawing-room. Felicity made an heroic effort to pull herself together.

"So glad to know you all," she said faintly. "I'm Mrs. Clive Arden, of Boston. I'm a painter woman, also a bit of a writer woman, and I have a cocoanut plantation on Moorea; so you see I'll be sympathetic with each of you. . . . And this is my friend and Manager, Mr. Moon."

"How do, Sir," said the Major. And the other two shook hands cordially with Moon.

"Mrs. Arden, I know some of your people," said Aubrey.

"Mrs. Arden, I know some of your pictures," said Devine.

"Come along," said Hillcrest. "If you're not too weak, Mrs. Arden, we'll walk to my house. It's only a short half-mile from here. By Gad! that was a narrow squeak. We've been watching these vermin for three days. We arrived just in time."

"Seems to me I've had nothing but narrow squeaks lately," said Felicity. "I ought to be getting used to them."

"What a terrible experience! Your pluck is marvelous, Mrs. Arden."

"No, it isn't. I'm really bluffing a bit, you know. At this very moment I want to both laugh and cry. I can hardly restrain myself. I don't really realize it all. When I do I'll probably break down."

"Oh, you mustn't think of it. I'm only afraid you'll find it rather dull in my humble bungalow. You'll have

no excitement there, beyond a game of bridge and a jazz to the phonograph."

"That sounds exciting enough. You know, I do realize how lucky I am."

"No, it's we who are lucky," chorused the three.

"I only hope you'll honor us by resting a while," said Hillcrest.

"We'll all be your slaves."

"Oh, nonsense! . . . Why, how perfectly lovely!"

"My house," said Hillcrest with pride.

It was half-hidden in a tangle of tropical greenery, a welter of glad-growing things. Amid clustering vines a broad flight of steps led to a noble veranda. Indeed, with the exception of a small central space, the entire floor was surrendered to the veranda. And everywhere, tempting to laziness, were deck-chairs, divans, hammocks.

"How charming!" she cried. But when she went forward to the front of the veranda she had no words. She stood there transfixed.

For the house was built right on the edge of the lagoon, and from where she stood it was like looking from the deck of a ship. The bay swept in a vast curve, and the reef was so remote that the expanse of water was imposing. And it was as still as a lake in the heart of hills. It was this stillness, this utter, infinite peace that seemed to overwhelm her. Tears filled her eyes. For a while she could not speak.

The three stood in silent sympathy.

Yes, it was a dream. Utterly unreal. Never had she felt such a sense of rest, of compelling tranquillity, as when she first looked from that broad balcony over the evening silence of the lagoon. It was peace made material in mountain, grove, and sea. Such lonely loveliness, such wistful, beseeching charm. Ah! she could gaze and gaze. Her heart melted with joy and gratitude.

At last she sighed deeply. "I'd like to live here always."

"You can, you know," said Hillcrest. "I'm prepared to lay it all with my hand and heart at your feet."

"This is rather sudden, isn't it? If you really knew me you wouldn't be so rash."

A barefooted native girl approached. She wore a simple dress of spotless white calico. Her thick hair was parted in two braids; her perfectly regular teeth were white as sea foam; her liquid brown eyes full of sunshine. Her skin was of an amber brown with golden lights, and softer than satin. She moved with lissom grace, while her loose frock showed the shape of her little pointed breasts.

"This is Mara," said Hillcrest; "a full-blooded Tahitian, and the daughter of my housekeeper. She will consider it an honor to be your maid while you remain here. You must excuse our being dressed in this fashion, but in Tahiti do as Tahitians do. However, we tog up for dinner. I think Mara will be able to give you anything you need."

Then he turned to Moon. "As for you, sir, that's a harder problem. You're such a big chap. Muscled like a gladiator, by Gad! My things won't fit you; but perhaps Devine, who is broader, can find you something."

"Righto!" said Devine cheerily; "we'll manage. Oh, I say, Mrs. Arden, it's so jolly to have you here. We'll talk painter's shop by the hour."

"No, you won't," broke in Aubrey. "Because you make weird daubs and paint cocoanuts on banana palms, don't think it gives you the right to monopolize our guest."

"I say, we'll be quarreling over Mrs. Arden before we're done," said Hillcrest. "Let's go and dress."

"You're all too good to me," she sighed, looking wistfully into their smiling faces. Theirs was the easy man-

ner of well-bred men, sure of themselves, tactful, never too serious. Her kind of men.

Mara, too, was smiling at her elbow, and pointing to one of the rooms.

"But I fear I'm taking your room, Major Hillcrest."

"No, indeed. It's our guest-chamber. In any case, it would be a very great honor, a very great privilege, to give you my room. But, as you may know, sleeping here is a primitive affair. It is entirely shorn of ceremonial importance. One has no need of a covering, and a mat is preferable to a mattress. It's almost casual. One simply stretches out somewhere when one's weary, and rises when one's rested. Doesn't that seem natural? I have no regular hours of sleep. Often I get up in the middle of the night, plunge into the lagoon from the balcony, swim an hour or so, then lie down till dawn. We all rise with the sun. Not having to dress makes it easy, you know. And then the temperature's always the same, always balmy, so there's none of that reluctance to leave a warm bed for a cold room. Our life's beautifully uncomplicated. We keep only what's best in civilization, and discard all that's undesirable."

"Yes, it's charming. I'm just beginning to understand it."

She was moving off with Mara when Moon approached her.

"I think I'll push on to Papeete," he said awkwardly.

"Why?"

"Oh, I feel . . . I'm out of my element here."

"No, you're not. You must stay. I want you to stay. Remember that you are in my employment now. You must obey orders."

He looked at her in a troubled way.

"All right," he said humbly. "If you comand me, I'll stay."

CHAPTER IV

MOON IS LONELY

AT dinner Felicity was extravagantly happy. Mara had provided her with a simple frock of laundered linen that fitted loosely yet gracefully her slender figure. With studied carelessness she piled up her dull-gold hair and twisted some *tiare* blossoms in it. She had neither shoes nor stockings, but she wound about her bare ankles a blue *pareu* to protect them from the mosquitoes.

The three men wore the white evening dress of the tropics, with silk, soft-bosomed shirts and black ties. Their faces glowed with health and happiness. Moon had borrowed a suit of white drill that buttoned up to the neck. He looked tall and gaunt and rather awkward, though Felicity shot encouraging glances at him. She herself was radiant.

The table was set in a corner of the balcony. A lattice-work covered with the bougainvillæa vine surrounded them on two sides. Through it glimmered the lagoon, caressing them with a fresh and gentle air. On the other side was the deep and dewy underwood, breathing a soft balm of hibiscus and *tiare* blossoms.

A golden-shaded lamp flooded the table with a mellow radiance. It illumined the bronzed faces of the men, leaving all behind them in mysterious gloom. There was a crystal bowl of roses, and carnations in slender flutings of cut glass. The napery was snowy, the silver of ex-

quisite design, the wine glasses like gleaming bubbles. A table, indeed, that would have done honor to the manor of a marquis.

Mara and her mother served the meal, while downstairs her father and brother helped with the cooking. The dinner was a piquant *mélange* of civilized and native food, with a fascinating element of surprise. Dainties from California vied with delicacies from Tasmania. There was alligator pear, *homard Americaine*, breast of chicken cooked with bamboo shoots, golden *poi*, compounded of papia and bananas, and served with milk made from the grated rind of the cocoanut.

"It's simply wonderful, Major Hillcrest," said Felicity. "One might be in the St. Francis or the Ambassadors."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Dinner is really our one meal. Naturally, we save ourselves for it. During the heat of the day all one cares to eat is a little fruit. In these indolent climates one has to be abstemious. Speaking for myself, never did I have such good health. Energy, too. They talk about the languor of the tropics, but I find I want to be everlastingly up and doing."

Then as she looked from his cheerful and smiling face to the faces of the others she noted something for the first time. It was not only that all three seemed to be in perfect poise physically, mentally, morally; not only that they vibrated well-being—it was something more, something she had never seen in the faces of those who live in civilization. It was a deep-set serenity, a profound tranquillity, as if they had achieved harmony with the entire scheme of things. Their eyes were clear, candid, joyful. They laughed with a whole heart. They seemed to take things easily, as if nothing were greatly worth striving for, as if life can really be very charming if one takes it right.

They were all smoking over their coffee when she re-

marked: "You people appear not to have a care in the world."

Hillcrest seemed surprised. He looked at her thoughtfully.

"It never struck me. I don't believe I have. And you, Aubrey?"

The author shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know of anything that worries me particularly. Once upon a time rejected manuscripts upset me; but now I write so little and so carefully that my work's never refused."

"And you, Devine?"

The handsome young artist smiled and shook his head.

"Why should I? I've escaped from the land of worries, of landladies and duns, of grasp and grind. All worry seemed to slip from my shoulders the moment I set foot on this delectable isle. Here I am free to develop myself, to realize whatever personality I have. I don't care a whoop for popular success. I want to do something new, something different. I'm doing it, so I'm happy."

"Of course," said Aubrey, "I agree with you about popular success, but I go further. I don't think any success really matters. In the end both the good work and the bad are scrapped. It's all futility—all the little scribbling Nobodies who think they're scribbling Somebodies. A man's a fool who fancies he's doing something that counts. That's why the chap who gets a cool cash return for his brain stuff is the wise man after all. . . . We're shadows pursuing shadows. What does civilization mean? Struggle, anxiety, fever, fret. Once I worked on a Chicago newspaper, and there I saw men who were old and played out in their thirties. So I made up my mind I'd 'Gauguin' it. It was too complicated, too grueling, and in the end—emptiness. Well, I've gone

back to a more primitive state of existence, and I'm happy. That's the great outstanding fact—*I'm happy.* My brain's clear, my body's vigorous. Here in a world of unbelievable beauty I am in love with life again. Is there any more to be said?—I am happy, purely and simply happy."

Then Hillcrest spoke, his lean, keen face lighting up.

"I came here first because of my health. Lung trouble—gassed. Well, lung trouble's practically eliminated in this climate. I'm a perfectly sound man again. I had a limited income and no profession but soldiering. I was one of the New Poor. So I settled in Tahiti, bought a piece of land, built this house. Now, I said, I bother no one and I expect no one to bother me. On this, my own little bit of the earth, I am King. Wars, plagues, famines don't matter to me any more. The whole structure of civilization may crash in ruin, my sun will shine as serenely, my bananas still ripen. Even the echoes of its fall will not trouble me. To me the sophisticated world has almost ceased to exist. My world is here on this happy isle. I am a natural man, living under natural conditions. Infinite leisure, infinite liberty. Here I will abide and enjoy it to the end."

"Sounds to me like exile," said Felicity. "Now, if your health were in no danger of being impaired, and if you had loads of money, and if someone were to leave you the darlingest old Tudor house in Kent, and if the house had fifty acres of woodland, and if the woodland had the most wonderful shooting—well, would you go on staying here?"

"Ah, dear lady, there are too many 'if's' in your hypothesis. It takes reflection."

"And you, Mr. Aubrey? Suppose you wrote a wonderful book, and your publisher sent you a fat check with the promise of more to follow, and if people were dying

to lionize you, what would you do? Wouldn't you just pack up your old kit bag and hike for sunny California and the redwoods and the sierras and Coronada and even Hollywood?"

The author twinkled through his glasses.

"What you suggest so stultifies my imagination I cannot conceive of an answer."

"And you, Mr. Devine," she went on. "I won't ask you any foolish questions. As a fellow-painter I know already what you will do. One of these days you'll wander back to Broadway, you'll give an exhibition on Fifth Avenue, you'll be feasted and fêted. Oh, we're all alike, members of society, owing a certain debt to society. I just wanted to get behind this disease, this South-Seaitis, the psychology of the thing. We all succumb to it, but there's hope for the worst of us. Even beauty palls, and it's so utterly beautiful that it's cloying—like that delicious *poi* we ate to-night. Well, now, you've all given me a different reason why people settle in the South Seas."

"There may be another," said Aubrey thoughtfully. "Invincible laziness. I know one man who came down here to develop, he said, his Ego. A life of meditation in exquisite environment—that was his idea. He went about naked, became physically superb. Probably he developed mentally, too, for he would spend hours apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a chicken. When you asked him what was the result of all this, he would answer sublimely: 'I am.' Well, so long as *he* was pleased . . ." An expressive shrug finished the phrase.

"After all," said Hillcrest, "what does it matter so long as we're happy? Fellow Lotus-eaters, are we happy?"

Chorus: "Yes, we're happy."

During the conversation Moon had been silent. Felicity could not help contrasting his austere face with the joyous

abandon of the others. She felt sorry for him, he seemed so out of place. And now Hillcrest began to talk of the South Seas in a general way. He spoke of the vast stone images on Easter Island, standing on platforms with their backs to the sea.

"Their origin is wrapped in mystery. Hewn out of volcanic rock, some of them weigh thirty tons, and there must be hundreds of them."

"There were over six hundred when I was there," said Moon.

All stared at him.

"The devil!" said Hillcrest. "Here you let me go on describing them from what I've read, and you've seen them. How d'you come to visit Easter Island?"

"Shipwrecked."

"Tell us about it," said Aubrey eagerly.

"Nothing to tell. We were carrying lumber from Portland, Oregon, to Antofagasta when we got into a gale and sprung a leak. We had to take to a boat, and sailed over seven hundred miles, gales all the time. We made a sea anchor out of our blankets. It took us nine days before we sighted the island. We were all in, starved, mad with thirst, but it took us two more days before we could land. That was the worst."

"Is that the only time you've been shipwrecked?" asked Felicity.

"No, two other times. I got to think I was a Jonah at last. Every voyage something happened."

"What about the other shipwrecks?"

"Once in Patagonia. We had to walk a hundred miles bare-footed to reach Gallegos. We lived on raw shellfish. I won't forget the trip."

"And the third time?"

"Off the coast of Iceland," said Moon laconically.

He seemed uneasy at finding himself the center of interest. He fingered his cigar nervously, then suddenly shut up. It was evident he had no wish to talk of his adventures.

"Interesting chap," said Aubrey to Felicity. "Seen more than the three of us put together, but tight as a clam."

"I say," said Hillcrest suddenly, "Mrs. Arden, have you ever seen the hula-hula danced? Mara does it beautifully. You'll dance for us, won't you, Mara?"

The girl was clearing the table. She hung her head timidly, and a blush darkened her golden cheeks.

"Come, Mara," said Hillcrest, "I'll buy you a silver crucifix next time I go to town if you do."

Finally Mara was persuaded. She went away for a few minutes and returned with her dark glossy hair brushed over her shoulders. Her snowy white dress came down to a little below the knee, and her beautifully formed arms were bare. Her skin was golden; her breasts just in the bud. According to the Tahitian type she was a beauty—firm, strong, wholesome.

But it was her wonderful freedom of movement that held the eye like a charm. She had the lithe grace of a young leopard. She moved like a melody.

So Hillcrest put the proper record on the phonograph, and Mara danced for them. If her walking was a joy, her dancing was a dream. The hula-hula is a lascivious dance, but Mara put poetry into it in place of passion. With her hands outstretched in a gesture of beauty to the peculiar throb of the music, her bare feet glided over the floor. Her slim body swayed and undulated, and when at the last she dropped almost to her knees with arms extended, the effect was strangely seductive and compelling.

They applauded with fervor. Felicity was stirred.

Secretly she determined that Mara should teach her the dance. Then Hillcrest proposed bridge, and Moon having excused himself, the four others made up a party.

Moon descended to the beach. There was a long, slim pier running out over the water. It ended in a tiny platform, and here he stretched on the warm boards, threw away his cigar and lit his pipe. That was more in his line. He did not belong to the cigar crowd. She did. She was right in her element with those men up there. Bridge, art, society! Ah! what a gulf lay between them. She was a lady, rich, cultured, beautiful; he a roughneck, a poor devil who had "gone up against it" all his life. He wanted to get away from this place.

A shadow drew close to him. It was Pepé, the little brother of Mara. He stood on the edge of the wharf, still as a statue of bronze, with a slim, four-pronged spear poised in his hand. His dark eyes were fixed on the darker water. Speaking no word, he watched, waited.

Moon studied him. A little savage boy, yet in some ways how vastly his superior. In vision, for instance. Pepé could see things he could not. As he peered into the book of the waters, the boy had the gravity of a sage. Skill and craft were his, the wisdom of the wild.

As Pepé hung there, so patient, so tense, Moon longed to see that slim spear hurled into the depths. He, too, gazed over the side of the wharf into that black gulf of mystery; but all he could discern was an occasional flicker of phosphorus. Pepé saw a secret world teeming with life. The boy would thrive where he would starve. That silent little figure, primitive, poetic, moved him to admiration.

Somehow he felt comforted. Maybe he too was in some ways superior to the men he had left. In strength, in daring, in endurance, perhaps. If it came to a grapple

with the Wild, he might survive where they would perish. He was a link between them and this savage.

From where he lay on the warm boards above the raven-black water, he regarded the house nestling in its green covert. Its lamp was like a star, and sent across the lagoon a copper glow. The veranda was a diffused harmony of orange light, its core that golden lamp.

He could see them over their bridge, her heaping, dull-gold hair, the piquant sweetness of her face. He sighed. . . . Throwing off his clothes, he plunged into the lagoon. The water was soft and velvety, and in its languid peace he floated awhile. To his ears came the resonance of a mile of perilous foam. He felt a strange sense of detachment, as if the world of men and cities did not exist, had never existed.

This was his life—here in the Wild. Mountain, sea, and sky were all to him.

They had talked to-night of the reasons men fritter away their lives in these favored isles. Was there not another, a deeper?—the call of Nature. He felt it to-night, a oneness with the world about him, an indifference to the world where men spent their lives in pursuing shadows.

At last, tired of swimming, he sought the hammock they had assigned him, and slept like a tired child.

CHAPTER V

MORE SECRET DIARY

1.

LET us again peep into that private journal Felicity posts so religiously:

"Tahiti is shaped somewhat like a peanut with a shriveled end. The desiccated portion might correspond to what is called the Presque-Ile, and on it I am at present passing delicious days. But after such a whirl of incredible adventure dullness itself would be delightful. However, it has been very far from dull.

"This morning I awoke to the invariable resplendence of the dawn. The groves were melodious, and around me masses of flowers dripped richly. There were blossoms of snow and flame and blood. Under the cascading glory of a bougainvillæa vine I passed through a dewy glade to where a river rippled round a grassy mound. I plunged into the sweet water, and, lying down, let it swirl past me. As I soaked blissfully, I heard a shriek of laughter. Two scarlet-plumed birds seemed to swoop down the bank and alight in the water with a great splash. They were Mara and a little sister, swathed in *pareus* to the bust-line. So there we lay all three, laughing and content, while I admired the beautiful modeling of their arms and shoulders.

"I breakfasted with my three lotus-eaters in a little room off the kitchen. The sea crooned familiarly under the very window, and one could flip bread crumbs into the

mouths of the little silver fishes. Then I stretched out on the shore, smoked uncounted cigarettes and gazed over the lagoon. The beach sloped swiftly to lazy wavelets, the sea was gentle, and the roar of the reef was muffled to a drowsy growl. How pleasant to lie thinking of nothing at all, feeling as if one had no responsibilities, no cares, no ambitions, and only the most primitive of desires.

"At last I roused myself and regarded the Lodge of the Lotus-Eaters.

"A fairy-like home poised over the silver strand. It nestles in an exotic tangle of a garden, and behind it are emerald mountains. The beach is white with coral, and the palms crowd down, plumed and bronze-helmeted.

"The house has a glorious veranda, not a door nor a window anywhere. It is always cool and airy. There are soft lounges on which one can close one's eyes to the stars, sleep to the gentle lullaby of the lagoon, and wake to the smiling welcome of the dawn. Every sunrise and sunset is a marvel of loveliness.

"I have been swimming in the lagoon. From the little pier I could gaze to the garden of coral and watch the fishes darting in and out its bowers and groves. The sea is neither too hot nor too cold. It would be impossible to catch a chill, either in air or water.

"So I swam about or dangled idly from the pier. In that crystal water one's body has the color of ivory. I gazed along the surface of the lagoon to where sparkled a little jeweled island, though I dared not swim out to it because of sharks. Not that I believe there were any, but in the depths my imagination makes of every shadow a sinister shape.

"When I was tired of swimming I dangled my legs over the pier and watched the coral garden. What an absorbing life I saw through that limpid crystal, a life of trepi-

dation and tragedy, where the strong preyed without mercy on the weak!

"In hues of rarest loveliness the coral flowers and fashions. It is, indeed, like a gorgeous garden blooming in patterns of rich and glowing beauty. And amid its groves dart rainbow-fishes that mimic its coloring. One watches them unwearily. Now in silvery arbors they lurk like shadows, now launch birdlike amid the foliage, in pursuit of weaker brethren. There is a flashing in and out, an ecstasy of movement. Here comes a silver shoal of them floating around the golden bowl of a hibiscus blossom and trying to pull it under. But they all scatter wildly, as a fantastic shadow rises from the green dusk to investigate. You look at its impossible form, its incredible coloring, and you shake your head. 'There ain't no such fish,' you say sadly.

"This is the land of rum-punch and roast pig. We had both yesterday evening, with the result that my dreams were fantastic.

"There are only two rooms in this open-air house. One is the library, the other my bedroom. The library is lined with rare and curious books, nearly all damaged by water. Here the native family sleep, shutting themselves in for fear of spirits and keeping a globeless and smoking lamp alight by the door.

"My bedroom is insectivorously interesting. There are flying cockroaches and mosquitoes that get at me even with my netting down. There is also on the mosquito-netting a great motionless spider hugging a white bag full of eggs. Doubtless there are hundreds—due to hatch out (I sincerely hope) after my departure. Then there's a huge black hornet that buzzes resentfully. She is building a nest like a tiny thimble of clay attached to the woodwork. Every now and then she flies in with fresh clay and molds

it round the rim. Soon she will enter, leave her eggs inside, close the nest, and fly away.

"Of my three lotus-eaters Major Hillcrest interests me most. A charming fellow! During the day he wears only a *pareu* and a wrist-watch. He is lean and keen, and deeply bronzed, and has a tooth-brush mustache just turning gray. A man of the world, he has been nearly everywhere and done nearly everything, and now he is the owner of the best vanilla plantation on the island. This morning he took me over it.

"If I were a poet and had to work, I think I should be a vanilla-planter. It seems almost idyllic. I would spend my time in pale-green corridors, tending vanilla vines. Between those walls of emerald shade I would have a feeling of solitude and intimacy with Nature that would be utterly soothing to my spirit.

"The vines are set in regular rows and supported on small post-like trees that, sprouting, give them the shade they need. They are so tender these beautiful plants, so almost human, they seem grateful for human solicitude. The leaves are long, waxy, exquisite. The beans hang in clusters of such elegant form and color one hesitates to touch them. Surely a very patrician of plants, with blossoms so delicate, so sensitive they open only to close with the pang of fecundation.

"For all the fertilizing has to be done by hand. As soon as a blossom opens, a worker with a small twig of orange scrapes off a little of the outer pollen and transfers it to the interior. Then, almost as if it had received a wound, the flower closes. This is called 'marrying the vanilla.'

"But what constant labor! At the first sign of ripening, the beans are plucked and put in a sweat-box. Then they are wrapped in woolen blankets and during the day laid out in the sun. This goes on till they are thoroughly

cured. It takes four pounds of the plucked beans to make one pound of the cured ones; nine months are needed to prepare it for the market.

"There now! I think it's very clever of me to remember all that. And as I strolled with the Major in that charming place a fat pony came from somewhere, and we fed it with huge bananas. Then Mara climbed a tree and dropped ripe guavas into my hat. When we got back we found that Pepé had caught two huge, carp-like fishes. They were of a bright and vivid green, just like fishes of porcelain. So we ate them for lunch, and they were delicious.

"I have been looking at some of Devine's daubs. He purposely draws out of proportion. He explains that he wants to suggest, not to express. He loathes precision and verisimilitude. He will paint a naked woman green to harmonize with his color-scheme. Whether you admire him or not, you can't refuse him sympathy: he is so earnest. No doubt he can draw, he can paint; but deliberately he sacrifices his chance of popular success to do 'something different.'

"We have been invited to a feast given by the local chief. I expect it will be fun. The Major will drive me with his fat pony, the others will walk. I would rather walk too, but the Major insists on driving me, and maybe it will give our arrival at the feast more *éclat*. The chief is a charming old thing with a smile that would be engaging if it were not for his decayed teeth. His wife is a very vast woman. I believe even Mrs. Calvin Gridley would look sylphlike beside her.

"They have two daughters. Pomona, the eldest, is a true-to-type Tahitian, a savage, pure, and (I hope) undefiled. She has dense, blue-black hair, coal-black eyes under coarse-black eyebrows, a pomegranate-hued skin.

and lips as if a bee had stung them. Her large limbs are superbly formed, and her movements are beautiful in their grace and freedom. She is unmarried but has no children.

"Aroma, the second daughter, has the legendary qualities of the Tahitian siren. 'All the men end by falling for Aroma,' Aubrey tells me. There is something impulsive, childlike, intensely natural about her. She is a gentle creature with a great capacity for loving—and giving. With her, immorality is speedily translated into amorality. Up to date, I am told, Aroma has had six natural children. How many more she may have Heaven only knows, for she is still in the early thirties. According to Tahitian ideas, the more the merrier. They love children, I suppose, because they have to take so little trouble with them. Owing to the Mother Hubbard wrappers the women wear, Aroma's last maternal effort came as a surprise to everyone.

"So these are our hostesses, and to-morrow I hope to describe the feast."

2.

"We are assembled on a grassy mound overlooking the beach. Enter Aroma. She crowns us each with flowers. On our unworthy brows she places wreaths of petals, snow-white and blood-red. It makes us feel like young gods and goddesses in a grove. The perfume of the gardenias is exquisitely sweet, but I am wondering if my wreath is on straight and if it matches my complexion. I have only Major Hillcrest's word for it. He, I tell him after his third rum-punch, looks more like Bacchus than Apollo.

"And now behold us garlanded for the feast, and the feast awaiting us. It has been spread under a pavilion of woven palm-leaves. The posts are wound with banana-fronds, and from the eaves hang tasselled fringes of silky

fiber. On the ground banana-leaves have been laid. Scarlet flowers twine amid them, and gleaming blossoms are heaped down the center. I am shown my place.

" 'Tuck your legs under the table,' says Aubrey.

"We squat Turkish fashion. Opposite me Mrs. Chief is lowered to a sitting position. On her right is Hillcrest; looking like a happy schoolboy on her left Devine, very gay and debonair.

"In front of me my portion of food seems to be heaped indiscriminately, but on looking closer I see that each separate dish is neatly arranged on a large leaf. A cocoanut bowl contains some white sauce.

" 'You must eat everything with your fingers,' says Hillcrest, 'dipping it in the sauce. Begin with the shrimps.'

"I select a gargantuan shrimp and disrobe it. Fain would I season it with salt and pepper, but it may not be. Relentless tradition compels me to sop it in that milky sauce. Gingerly I immerse it and eat it with distaste. Then I transfer my attention to the lobster. Oh, for some mayonnaise! Alas! I must again dip it in that sickly sauce. I am thirsty, but the liquor in my green cocoanut is warm and sweet. Oh, for some ice-water!

"How about the roast sucking pig? A little heap awaits me on another broad leaf. I mess into it with my fingers. Good! Now, if I only had a plate, a knife, a fork and some bread, how I would enjoy that baby pig!

" 'You must dip it in the sauce and eat bread-fruit or *fei* with it,' Aubrey tells me.

"The bread-fruit looks like a big chunk of fungus, tastes like it too. Hopefully I turn to the *feis*. They are emasculated bananas. They have absolutely no taste at all. I could not have imagined anything so profoundly, aggressively, elaborately tasteless. But between two evils choose

the lesser; the bread-fruit with its faint suggestion of benzine is preferable to the appalling insipidity of the *fei*.

"What a messy, sticky business it is! I feel like a pig and fancy I must look like one. I am really furiously hungry. However, there remains the *poi*. I have great hopes of the *poi*. It surely will not fail me. I'll fill up on *poi*.

"Two glutinous slabs are before me, one silver, the other golden. I first pry off a piece of the silvery stuff. It tastes like mucilage. I try the golden. It tastes like . . . more mucilage.

"However, the *poi* has staying power. One morsel keeps me chewing for the rest of the time and allows me to refuse politely other offers of food.

" 'No,' I say; 'I'm so crazy about this *poi* I simply can't look at anything else.'

"Hillcrest pluckily eats through his portions; Devine toys delicately with the thigh of a young pig; all are laughing except the melancholy Moon. Under crowns of flowers brown faces and white are alive with animation and greasy with pig fat.

" 'You know,' said Aubrey, 'the Tahitian is a most musical creature, and never more so than when he is eating. The music varies with the dish, and a whole table sounds like an orchestra.'

"Devine looks like a young faun. All he seems to need is a nymph to carry off to the groves. And nymphs are not lacking, nor would, I imagine, their resistance be too desperate. Ah, these golden girls! their hair spun out like clouds of night and starred with flowers; their velvety eyes voluptuously shining, and their breasts like ripe pomegranates—if I were a man I think I should surely 'fall for them.'

"The feast is over. Three stalwarts hoist the chieftess

to her feet. My legs are full of pins and needles, and my back aches. So I steal off to the beach, and, taking out a bit of hard tack, munch it contentedly under the stars. . . .

"Heigh-ho! How strange it all is! Like a dream. Not a bit real. Who are you, Felicity Arden, sitting on a coral beach under the stars? What are you? Why are you? Did you ever in some past life sit on a coral beach under a starry sky? It seems as if you did, somehow. And did some savage lover come behind you then and clasp you in his arms? (I look round apprehensively.)

"I shouldn't chaff the chief and his family. Heaven knows I love them for their kindness! But I simply can't help seeing the ludicrous side of things. (And how much of life is ludicrous!) I wish I were more sentimental. I try to imagine Coombs here to-night. His misery. Clive would have enjoyed it though. He would have been the life and soul of the party. He never could see anything but the funny side of things. He would chaff the Grim Reaper himself. Poor, poor Clive! I don't think of him as much as I ought. Life throbs in me. Sometimes I forget! Ah! that's the saddest part of loss—one gets over it. . . .

"There! There are tears in my eyes. It's good to have a comfortable cry now and again. . . .

"Who's that sitting on the beach like me, meditating under the stars? Methinks it's my mysterious Moon. Come hither, Jack Moon, and I will share my biscuit with you. . . .

"You refuse to eat? All right. Because you're smoking. . . . Then I too will smoke. Sit down by my side and I will light my cigarette at your pipe. . . .

"(Now I know. Jack Moon is one of those 'strong,

silent men.' But generally they are bold and brutal. He is diffident and quite gentle.)

" 'I saw you having a flirtation with Aroma," I say. 'How dare you?'

" 'I did not,' he replies indignantly.

" 'Anyway, she was making eyes at you.'

" 'I never noticed the woman,' he retorts with emphasis.

"I fear Jack Moon has no sense of humor. I never could abide for long a man with no sense of humor. Let him break all the sins in the Decalogue (and a few more) I could say: 'I'll forgive you.' But to lack a sense of humor—that's the unpardonable fault.

"One thing about him—one can trust oneself with him. He's not dangerous. Perhaps I would prefer him if he were—a little.

" 'You know,' I inform him, 'we're going to Moorea to-morrow. Major Hillcrest is taking us over in his cutter. I told him all about it. He's quite excited. We're going to turn Gridley out. Are you glad?"

" 'I'll be glad to go back to Moorea.'

" 'You don't like it here?'

" 'Not much.'

" 'I understand. Well, you can remain there, this time. Goodness knows, there's enough to do. I'd like you to plant some of that vanilla. It's so idyllic. . . . Oh, I say, let's go for a swim.'

" 'But . . . after eating?'—in a startled voice.

" 'You're dreaming, man. We haven't eaten. We're as hollow as those shells on the beach. Besides, it doesn't matter. Here with the sea so warm one can go in after a gorge. Come on. I'll go and get my bathing costume, and you get a *pareu*. I'll meet you here in five minutes. We'll swim out to the reef.'

"Oh, it's a great life, Jack Moon—a great life. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN

1.

UNDER the arch of the sail Felicity watched fading Tahiti and brightening Moorea.

No sooner had they glided out of the lagoon than they met with dirty weather. The little cutter heeled and swung in gulfs of yeasty water, and from time to time the sea breached over them, drenching everyone. Then the sky cleared, and the girl, outstretched on the hatch, watched the mast-head swinging round the sun. Would it never have done with its crazy jigging, this wretched little boat? She was soaked and sick, but not anxious. The grinning face of the native steersman was a reassurance in itself. Nevertheless, it was with relief she saw Moorea take form and color. She appreciated their delicacy of feeling in not offering her lunch.

However, when they got in the lee of the island, all that changed. The boat glided along; the sea undulated gently and assumed a vitreous blue. It was so clear, they could see the bottom mysteriously sliding below them. Ah! never had she seen water of such marvelous indigo. One would imagine that a glassful of it must be like a blue crystal.

Dolphins! Leaning over the bow she could almost touch them. The orange fin on their backs cut the glasslike sea. A jolly score they sheered along, darting ahead a few feet, diving hilariously, enjoying themselves hugely. She could

see their brown, gleamy bodies, their piglike heads, as with powerful tail-sweep they propelled themselves like veritable torpedoes. Such a happy family, so sleek, so friendly! For a long time they kept up their playful antics, then quite abruptly they vanished.

Flying-fish! They were great solitary ones that flashed gemlike from that jeweled sea. Silvery-bodied, amber-winged, they volplaned down the wind; brilliant apparitions that disappeared as suddenly as they had come.

Bonita! A very long line was trailing from the stern. All at once it was violently agitated. Far away was a commotion in the water. When the line was pulled in it held a fish as big as a good-sized salmon. It was powerful, steel-colored, and so vigorous in its struggles it had to be knocked on the head with an ax.

They were holding a course just outside the reef. In contrast with that cerulean sea, the lagoon was willow green. Like lines of white-maned cavalry the breakers charged the reef. She saw the spume and smoke of the onset, and the rearing wave, glass clear, before the shock.

On shore, above the palm fringe, rose velvety hills of rare beauty. But it was their fantastic outline that held the gaze. They were like huge medieval ruins. Here was a cathedral spire, there a Norman keep, yonder the ramparts of a citadel. And the victorious verdure covered them with a semblance of ivy that completed the illusion.

Dominating all was the Mountain of the Eye. From where they beheld it, it had the outline of a woman with uptilted face and streaming hair. And set in the face just where the eye should be was a tunnel-like hole.

"Legend has it," explained Hillcrest, "that it was a gigantic goddess turned to stone. In ancient days they used to worship her, and in the forests where no one dares to go for fear of spirits, are altars stained with the blood

of human sacrifices. Behold the genius of Mysterious Moorea."

Rounding a point they came on the wreck of a French gunboat. Behind it black ramparts of mountain reared to a dizzy height; round it eternally was the full-mouthed roar of the reef. As it lay heeled over to port the great gray combers swept along its iron decks, swirled into its cabin, and poured from its portholes.

"They say it was wrecked intentionally," said Hillcrest. "You see, it was old and out of date. Easier to pile it on the reef in this lonely spot than to sail it home and scrap it. Seems a shame though."

A melancholy sight; but about it swept a bay of spectacular beauty, a vast amphitheater of verdure, sweeping up from a curve of silver strand and dappled with cloud shadows.

2.

From his place by the steersman Moon watched Hillcrest and Felicity. Almost with a pang he realized what a well matched pair they were. To Hillcrest he gave his ungrudging admiration. The Major had something he lacked—poise, ease of manner, polish. Centuries of breeding had gone to his making. Eton and Oxford had given him their finish. There was in Hillcrest a quality of distinction to which he could never lay claim.

But it was not to this that Moon paid instinctive homage, it was to Hillcrest's intellectual attainments. For the Major was a scholar as well as a gentleman. His library showed that. Over two thousand volumes, and not a "dud" among them. Anthropology was his hobby, and there were books of travel and exploration by the hundred. He himself had made many trips into the great unknown—Papua, Patagonia, Abyssinia. China and India

he knew familiarly, while his considered ambition was to penetrate into Thibet. The world, indeed, was to him like a book with pages well thumbed.

He had a wonderful memory, too, and could recall his experiences in a way so vastly vivid he held his hearers spellbound. Besides this he never ceased to study, and long into the night when all the house was asleep he would lie reading by his solitary lamp. An unusual combination —a man of the world and man of the wild, epicure and philosopher, connoisseur and student. No wonder Felicity found him so interesting, and listened to him with fascinated attention.

It was now over three weeks since they had arrived at the Major's, and Moon had watched the growing intimacy between these two. He had accepted it with resignation, admitting himself unworthy even of her friendship. Hillcrest was a man of culture and refinement, brother of a baronet; he, Moon, was of the nether world. The prison, the ring, the forecastle, all had gone to his shaping. Once a roughneck, always a roughneck.

Yes, it was inevitable that Hillcrest and his lady should come together; inevitable the Major should love her—for who that knew her would not? Well, her happiness came before everything. He would be her slave, her shield if she needed him. But the Major was a gallant gentleman. He was the man for her.

3.

"How wonderful!" cried Felicity.

The little boat seemed to be steering direct for the reef; but suddenly black water appeared, and, gliding through it, they passed into a bay of notable beauty. Its water was emerald, as if stained by the boscage that billowed around it. In its noble sweep there was a serenity that

exalted the spirit. From the silver strand the mountains soared in gray escarpments or swept in gracious drapery of green.

"I never dreamed anything could be so perfectly lovely," she exclaimed. "See! You have everything—harmony, proportion, color. Why, it's worth crossing the world to see."

"Historic, too," said Hillcrest. "Cook gave it its name. But all Moorea is lovely—far more interesting, I think, than Tahiti. It's the isle of phantoms and fables. Even now whole valleys are *tabu*. You are to be congratulated on having a home in this haunt of mystery and romance."

"You must help me to make it habitable."

"May I? Ah! What a rare pleasure! I'm longing to see your place. But look! We're now in the blue lane that leads to it. Soon we'll be there. Aren't you nervous?"

"No. I regard it as a bit of sport."

"Good! I hope it won't prove dangerous sport. I was talking to Moon just now. He seems to think it'll be all right. Gridley, he believes, will never show fight, more's the pity. I expect that when we arrive we'll find all the birds flown. However, we are armed for trouble."

"Oh, I don't want anything of that kind. I'd rather go to Papeete and have them turned out in a proper and legal way."

"That might take months. Our way will be quicker, and, as you suggest, sportier."

"But I did not imagine there would be any danger for you."

"My dear lady, you must remember that Moorea is a savage and remote island where law is little more than a name. It has all sorts of wild and fantastic possibilities. . . . Ah! I must go aft now. You know I have a small motor to propel us in case of need. The wind is no longer

serving us. I must see that my donkey of a man is starting the engine up properly."

He disappeared into the small cabin, and soon the chugging of a motor was heard. Felicity beckoned Moon to join her in the bow.

"So we're going home, Jack Moon."

"Home! You call it that?"

"Why not? I see it, not as it is, but as it may be ten years from now. You'll help to make it worthy of the name, I hope."

"I'll do my best."

"I behold it with the eye of a visionary. I'll burn the house on the flat and build another on the hill. It will be octagon in shape, with a veranda all round. It will be painted white and have a broad driveway of coral with oleanders, frangipani, and tree-ferns lining it, and banana-palms to give the tropical note. It will overlook miles of cocoanut groves and leagues of blue lagoon. It will be clean and sweet and swept by the trade-winds. There will be bougainvillæa vines that hide its roof, and flamboyants that glorify its lawn. . . . Can you imagine all that?"

Yes, he could. A glow kindled in his deep-set eyes. It was a picture bright with promise—for him. He would be respected again, have work worthy of him, a home, books, that chance he never had. Best of all, he would be serving her. At the thought a great joy and thankfulness stirred in him.

"There's another thing you might do," she went on; "become a champion of the natives. Poor people! I fear they're doomed. First comes the Missionary. He tells them certain things are *tabu*, gives them the name of sins. He invents sin for them, makes sinners of them. Up to that time they had been unconscious of any wrongdoing,

happy children yielding to their instincts. After him comes the Trader. He invents clothes, and the native, no longer going naked, becomes less of a hunter, less of a fisher, more and more of a loafing degenerate. He becomes possessed of artificial tastes. Mr. Trader makes a slave of him. Then comes the Beachcomber with diseases which he has no power to resist. Mr. Beachcomber presents him with syphilis and consumption, and for good measure adds measles, whooping-cough, influenza, and even mumps. They are dying off fast the pure Tahitians. Soon there will be left only those whose mixed blood gives them the fitness to survive. And they're simply ingenuous children. The white man is their arch enemy, but while his knife is at their throat they smile. Ah! there's a profound pathos in that smile. . . . Jack Moon, there's a worthy task for you. Be a good friend to them, won't you?"

Silently he nodded. Up to then he had not looked at the native in that light.

"Look!" she exclaimed suddenly. "The sun has set. It will be night before we get there. It gets dark so swiftly."

"No, we'll make it. We're only two beaches away. Are you getting nervous?"

"Well, just a little now. You see, I don't know what's going to happen, what we'll find when we get there."

"Of course, you'll remain on board?"

"Must I? I'd like to stick with the crowd. Somehow you always give me a nice safe feeling. Please let me go with you."

"No."

"All right, then. I'll be a good, obedient girl."

4.

It was dusk when they glided to a position in front of the house; dark by the time they had dropped anchor and lowered the boat. The four men got in silently and rowed ashore, while Felicity watched them anxiously from the deck.

A heavy raincloud had just come up, and the absence of stars made the darkness more dense. The absence of wind, too, intensified the silence; and it was in this darkness and silence that the four men crept in the direction of the house. Already a sense of adventure thrilled them, while the chance of an attack made them clutch their revolvers. But nothing happened, and soon they were at the veranda steps.

"I want to go alone," said Moon. "I know the house, and there's no use of more than one taking any risk."

The others demurred, but he was firm.

"This is my show," he declared. "No one goes but me."

As he mounted the steps there came to him a recollection of the last time he had ascended that veranda. Then Gridley had ordered him away; now he was going to order Gridley away. The job was to his liking. So he paused at the head of the stairs and listened, wondering at the great stillness.

"Hullo there!" he called clearly.

No reply.

"Anybody in?"

Silence.

A curious feeling came over him. It was not fear really, but a sort of nervous tension. There was something so very sinister in the quiet of that dark house. For a moment he hesitated; then, going forward, he pushed aside the fringed screen of the doorway. Cautiously he entered.

He was in the small vestibule that led to the dining-room, and on either side, he knew, were bedrooms. Acutely he listened. As he did so, he realized that he was putting himself in a very dangerous position. Anyone in the house would be justified in supposing him to be on evil bent. Maybe even at that moment someone was training a gun on him. The thought made him more nervous. Again he listened.

Tap, tap, tap! . . . Surely that was the beating of a human heart. Bah! So it was—his own. Groping along the wall, he moved forward. Then again he started. A tall shadow was behind him. Quick! He covered it with his revolver.

"Don't shoot," came a hoarse whisper. "It's I, Hillcrest. Damn it, man, I couldn't let you go alone!"

"All right. We should have brought a torch. Have you any matches?"

"Here's a box."

"Good! There may be a lamp in the dining-room. I'll go and see."

"Seems to be no one in the house."

"I don't know. There's a curious smell."

Again Moon moved forward, then Hillcrest heard a noise of stumbling and a startled exclamation.

"What is it?"

"It's . . . a body. Seems like someone dead."

"Light a match quick."

Moon fumbled. The first match fizzled out, but the second flared.

He bent down.

"It's Mrs. Gridley," he gasped.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

"IS she dead?"

"I don't know. She's lying in such a funny way I can't see her face. Damn! The light's out."

"Hurry. Strike another."

"These cursed Chinese matches. There . . . Why, her hands and feet are tied. Cruel work."

The brief flicker showed them the half-breed lying on her side. Her hands were bound behind her back with whipcord that cut into the flesh. Her bare feet were similarly fastened. Again the light went out.

"I don't think she's dead," said Moon hopefully. "Mighty near it though. What dirty game's this? I must find a lamp. There's none on the dining-room table."

"In the bedroom to the right there's a table near the door. Perhaps? . . ."

Moon struck another match and pushed aside the fringe screen. It was the same room that Felicity had occupied. On the dressing-table was a small lamp. He lit it with the match which had burned down to his very fingers. Hillcrest gripped his arm.

"Look! Someone on the bed."

Moon took up the lamp and parted the mosquito-curtains.

"Gridley!"

"He seems dead."

"No . . . I don't think so. . . . Funny. He's unconscious, anyway. Call the others."

Hillcrest called; then he added:

"Look out! There's a body in the corridor."

In a moment the other two had joined them.

"Aubrey, you're a bit of a doctor—what about this fellow?"

Aubrey bent down, felt Gridley's wrist, lifted an eyelid.

"He's not dead. Seems in a kind of a trance, though. Strange!"

Moon had severed the cords that cut so viciously into Mrs. Gridley's flesh.

"Give me a hand. We'll lift her on that couch in the dining-room."

Hillcrest and Devine helped him.

"Aubrey, come and see this woman," called Hillcrest.

Rapidly Aubrey examined her.

"She's all right. Coming round already. She was nearly suffocated, though. Look here . . ."

He pulled at something that was cutting into the dark throat. A loop of whipcord.

"Someone's been trying to bowstring her."

The four men stared at each other. In their silence Devine started.

"Listen! Don't you hear breathing?"

The others strained their ears. Yes, they could distinctly hear breath heavily drawn.

"It's in the bedroom to the left of the corridor," said Moon.

He led the way with the lamp. On the bed lay a man in an attitude of awkward abandonment. Moon brought the light close.

"It's Fang, Gridley's Chinaman."

An exclamation from Hillcrest. Bending down he picked up something.

"Ha! I have it," he cried. "This explains everything."

He held up an opium pipe.

"Dope. The gang are doped."

"Not the woman though," said Aubrey. "Foul work there. I expect she's conscious by now. Maybe we'll get an explanation."

Mrs. Gridley was indeed recovering rapidly. She opened her eyes and gave them a dazed stare. She made an effort to rise, but fell back again.

"Don't be afraid, Madame," said Aubrey. "You're all right now."

Wonderingly she looked at them. "I'm not afraid. Who are you?"

"We found you tied up . . ."

"Ah! I remember . . . Gridley! Where's Gridley?"

"He's in the bed in there. In a trance, I guess."

"Hitting the pipe again. Well, so much the better. I'll get up now. I want to see Gridley."

She rose and walked a little unsteadily into the bedroom. Moon kept close by her. Something in her manner warned him. Mrs. Gridley surveyed her sleeping mate with a bitter smile. He resembled a corpse with his fungus-white face, his bald, shiny head. His right arm was in a sling.

Then as the woman looked down on him her breath came faster. Moon could see her great breast heaving, and her eyes, fixed on that waxy face, were dilating strangely. A tremor ran through her.

All at once a hoarse shriek broke from her. Her dark face was distorted. In a convulsion of passion she threw herself on the sleeping man, and her hands were at his throat. It was Gridley's thick beard that saved him, that and the quick action of Moon. He wrenched away her strangling hold, but she was like a mad thing, and it took two of them to control her.

A William Fox Production.

The Roughneck.

THE SECRET OF THE LOCKET.

"Let me get at him!" she shrieked. "He tried to choke me. Now it's my turn."

"What shall we do with her?" said Hillcrest, panting with his efforts to hold her. "She's as strong as a horse."

"There's a small storeroom at the back," answered Moon. "We'll lock her in."

The storeroom was directly behind the dining-room and the door was stout. Pushing her in they turned the key.

Now they had disposed of her Moon thought of Felicity. She must be getting anxious. So, slipping away, he hurried through the palm grove and over the crab-riddled lawn. Arriving at the beach he jumped into the boat, and in a few strokes had reached the cutter. He expected to find the girl where he had left her, but there was no one to greet him. He leaped up and stared around the deck, then down into the little cabin. No one.

A panic seized him. What had happened? Suddenly he felt himself unnerved, incapable of thought. As far as she was concerned, at least, he was a coward. With beating heart he tumbled into the boat again and regained the beach. Fear was gripping him, torturing him. He started to run for the house to tell the others.

From a clump of hibiscus a slight form darted and clutched his arm. It was Felicity. He could scarcely speak.

"I couldn't wait," she explained breathlessly. "I felt I must see what was going on. So I got one of the boys to swim ashore for the boat and we all three landed."

"You gave me a bad scare."

"I'm terribly sorry; but I was anxious and excited. Tell me what's happening. Are they there?"

"Yes, but Gridley seems doped."

A light dawned on her. "Ah! I understand now."

She remembered his weariness, Fang, the orgy in the grove. A crowd of drug-fiends they were, degenerates.

"And Mrs. Gridley?"

"I can't understand her. Gridley seems to have made an attempt on her life."

"Tried to kill her. . . . Well, he hated her."

"Yes, there doesn't seem to be much love lost between them."

"Another mystery. She has some sort of hold on him. What a charming *ménage!*"

"If you'd seen the tiger way she tackled him you'd have called it a *menagerie*. But come on. We'll see the latest developments."

They joined the others round the lamp in the dining-room.

"Anything fresh?" asked Moon.

"No, the old girl's been howling her head off, and trying to hammer the house down."

At the same moment Mrs. Gridley's voice was heard in a raucous shriek with an accompaniment of violent thuds on the door.

"Cheerful," commented Aubrey. "Some she-devil."

"One time she tried to kill me," said Felicity with a shudder.

"I guess she'd mighty soon kill Gridley if she could get at him. I say, I think I see an unopened bottle of whisky in that buffet. Suppose we sample it."

They opened the bottle, got glasses, and sat round the table.

"Just as good a way as any to pass the time till dawn," said Hillcrest. "We can't do anything until these blighters come to their senses."

So the men smoked, drank whisky, and talked in low

tones. Mrs. Gridley was comparatively calm. Felicity lay on the couch and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again the window above her was brightening with daylight. Her gaze went past the half-drowsing men at the table to something beyond. It was the screen over the door of the left-hand bedroom. She was sure she saw it move ever so slightly. Yes, a face was staring out, a face with an expression of amazement and fear.

"Fang! He's awake!" she cried.

The others sprang up.

"Quick! He's trying to escape."

Moon grabbed the Chinaman, who already had one leg out of the window, and threw him back as a terrier would a rat. Fang lay on the floor, staring up fearfully.

"Come now," said Hillcrest. "What's the meaning of all this?"

"Me no do. Me velly good China-boy. Mista Glidlee he velly bad man. He kill Missy Glidlee, I think."

"What's the matter between them?"

"Me no savvy. She no likee, he no likee. All time fightee like hell! Pearl, I think. Missy Glidlee, she father catchee heap pearl. Mista Glidlee he no can find. He velly muchee mad. Maybe he think Missy Glidlee tell him. Me no savvy."

Fang cowered again, looking up with that terrified face.

"All right, you little beast! So you've been hitting the pipe, eh?"

"Mista Glidlee he heap like. Me smoke along him."

"Vile little brute! I say, boys, what will we do with him?"

"Put him in along with Mrs. Gridley," suggested Devine.

Fang emitted a howl of terror, and his howl was echoed

from the storeroom. There was a sound as of a heavy body hurled against the door, then a frenzied scream.

"Let me get at him! Let me just lay my hands on him! Gridley, you devil, I'll kill you! . . ."

"And all the time," said Hillcrest, "the man's probably dreaming of dazzling houris in a voluptuous paradise. . . . By Gad! I wonder if he is, though?"

He rose, and, lifting the screen, peered into the bedroom.

"Escaped!" he shouted.

The others jumped up and joined him. The bed was empty, Gridley gone.

"He must have awakened and slipped out by the window. Well, it's too late now. He's vanished utterly. But at least we've got the Chinaman."

So they turned once more to the dining-room, only to find that Fang, too, had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN BARBAZO

"I THINK I begin to understand," said Hillcrest, when they were all five seated round the table.

"You see, I remember a good deal about old Captain Barbazo, or the 'Commodore,' as some called him. When it became known he was afflicted with leprosy, although he must have concealed it for years, there was quite a scandal. People said he should be confined to the leper colony. In fact, the gendarmes made several attempts to take him, but he always fled to the hills. After a time they left him alone. Bella Barbazo, now Mrs. Gridley, helped him to escape, and used to visit him, taking him food. Very few, however, gave her credit for affection in what she did. Nearly everyone agreed that she was after the pearls."

"What pearls?" asked Aubrey.

"Well, the Captain was supposed to have the finest collection in the South Seas. He had a real passion for pearls. He would scour the islands for them, and kept only the biggest and the best. A drunken, brutal sea-rover of the old type, when it came to pearls he was a poet. He would voyage a thousand miles if he heard of a particularly fine one, and he would get it by hook or by crook. Many of his specimens must have had lurid, even tragic, histories, for I haven't a doubt he would have shot a kanaka like a dog who came between him and his obsession. In fact, a particularly ruthless old pirate hated all through the islands for his cruelty and lust."

Hillcrest paused a moment, poured himself some more whisky, and in his clear, incisive voice went on:

"You can imagine him all alone up there, dying of his terrible malady. He shunned all, was shunned by all. Only his daughter, Big Bella, went near him, and, as I have suggested, it is hard to say how much she was influenced by the pearls. The Captain kept them always by him in a steel box. On a night of the full moon he has been seen sitting on the porch of his cabin like a silver god, with the box between his thighs, and his claw-like hands playing amid the pearls, tossing them up, letting them trickle through his fingers in streams of light, feasting his eyes on their glimmer and sheen. At the last, they say, he was like a crazy, cunning child; but no one dared to steal his pearls, for a curse clung to them, the curse of the leper. So in time he died."

"And what became of the pearls?"

"No one knows."

"How's that?"

"Well, Big Bella attended him to the last, buried him, even. But there is no reason to believe she got the pearls. If she had she would have sold some, made a splurge. You know these half-breeds—all for display. But apparently the pearls had eluded her clutches. Gridley's too. The pearls represented a small fortune, so that if Gridley had got his hands on them he would have been off to civilization by the first boat."

The Major took a gulp of whisky and puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

"I don't know, though. Many a man is here on the islands because he wants to keep out of the clutches of the law. I sometimes wonder about Gridley. Who is he? I know he came from the States. I have heard he married Bella Barbazo thinking he would inherit her father's wealth. It might be well, Mrs. Arden, to inquire into his antecedents."

"I intend doing so," said Felicity.

"Well, it seems the old Commodore hated Gridley and opposed the marriage. In his way he was fond of his daughter, but he vowed Gridley should never profit by the union. So the pearls seemed to vanish, to melt into the moonbeams as he tossed them up like drops of light. . . . There you have the legend. How much of it is true I leave you to judge."

"Two things are possible," said Aubrey. "Either Mrs. Gridley got the pearls and has hidden them . . ."

"That would account for the situation between her and Gridley."

"Or the old man hid them himself, and she failed to get them."

"That would also account for it, because Gridley would never believe it."

"In any case, why do you suppose he wanted to kill her?"

"I don't suppose so. I merely think he wanted to frighten her, to make her confess where she had hidden them."

"But if she hadn't hidden them she couldn't confess."

"No, but Gridley evidently believed she knew where they were."

"Well, one thing is certain—they're hidden somewhere. Mrs. Arden, you have hidden treasure on your estate."

"I don't want it. They're welcome to it if only they would go away. I'll never be happy till I see Gridley off the island."

"The best thing is to 'sic' Mrs. Gridley on to him."

"By Jove! that's a good idea," said Hillcrest. "I was just wondering what we would do with the lady. We'd better release her at once."

Moon rose, and, going swiftly to the door of the store-

room, threw it open. He surprised Mrs. Gridley crouching close to it, an expression of cunning interest on her face. Evidently she had been listening. She rose with some dignity and gave him a look of angry scorn.

"You are free, Madame," said Hillcrest politely. "We regret we have been obliged to detain you, but in your excited state it was for your own good. We trust you are now in a calmer frame of mind."

Mrs. Gridley paid no heed to his words. She seemed to have but one idea.

"Where's my husband?" she demanded harshly.

"Sorry—he has escaped."

Her dark, equine face lowered; her black eyes were venomous.

"Escaped, has he? Well, I know of one he won't escape. Then God help him!"

Her gaze lighted on Felicity. Her lips curved in a malignant sneer.

"And you, Madame. I congratulate you. You are mistress here now. But I warn you there's a curse on the place, the curse of my dead father. It will fall on you as it has fallen on us. Remember what I say: while you remain here there will be no peace for you—nothing but strife, sorrow, death."

As she stood there massively she was quite impressive. Her black Mother Hubbard might have been the robe of a Lady Macbeth, and her voice had a tragic resonance. Then she pushed aside the fiber screen and left them staring after her.

"Quite an effective exit," said Aubrey after a moment's silence.

"She needn't think she'll frighten me," said Felicity indignantly.

But Moon looked rather solemn. Hillcrest, too, seemed impressed.

"Well, it's morning," she went on, "and morning suggests breakfast. I mustn't forget I'm your hostess. Why, here's Mowera."

Mowera was indeed smiling in the doorway.

Felicity was delighted.

"Come in, Mowera. You're just in time to help. Where have you been?"

"Me stay all night my papa. When me hear Madame come back, me come plenty quick."

"You heard? How?"

"Him fellah Fang go Papeete, plenty quick."

"Yes, I'm boss here now, and you must work for me."

"Mowera too much happy."

Fang's larder was well stocked, and they had no trouble in preparing a meal. They had four kinds of fruit, bacon, eggs, and coffee. The men enjoyed it hugely and paid her compliments on her début as a hostess. She was feeling happy again. She was in her own house, free and independent. After all, it wasn't such a bad sort of place. From the cool veranda she looked to the dazzle of the lagoon, and while she was enjoying this mood of satisfaction Hillcrest hailed her.

"We've got to get back now. You're coming with us, I suppose?"

"Thanks ever so gratefully, but . . . no."

"You're not going to remain here?"

"Why not? It's my place. I've a thousand ideas for it, and I can't get busy too soon. Besides, my brother-in-law will arrive in less than a month, and I won't have too much time. Yes, I'll remain here till he comes."

"But—the danger."

"Oh, I've Mr. Moon. I think he'll take good care of me."

"Yes, Moon's a good, faithful fellow and devoted to you. Well, if you change your mind let me know, and I'll

come in my boat and fetch you. In any case, I may venture over in a week or so."

"You're more than welcome any time, Major."

Hillcrest went to where Moon was filling his pipe.

"I tried to persuade her to come back with me."

"It would be better if she did," said Moon gravely.

"She won't, so there's nothing more to be said. Well, I, that is, we, leave her in your charge. You'll take good care of her, of course."

Moon frowned. "Of course."

"There may be danger."

"I'll protect her—with my life."

"All right, old chap. I'll go away with an easier mind."

The two shook hands. It seemed to Moon as if Hillcrest were committing Felicity into his care. After all, maybe he had a right to.

The three men were on the point of leaving when a broad figure darkened the kitchen doorway. It was Ironjaw Jones. Ironjaw was bowing to Felicity, and twisting his hat in a curiously embarrassed way.

"Well, what is it?"

"Beggin' yer pardon, Ma'am, but seein' as the boss and his missis have beat it, I thought you might want to fire me."

"That certainly was my idea."

"So I'm beggin' you, Ma'am, to keep me on. There's no one knows so much about the place as me. I can help you a mighty lot, Ma'am, 'specially at the start."

"But . . . you're in with them."

"No, Ma'am, I'm not. Gridley hired me to boss Chinamen. I never had no great use for him. He was doped half the time, and, I guess, a crook. I'm ready to fight at the fall of the hat, but I'm honest. I've always been honest. I've got the name of bein' a hard man, but I've

always been faithful to them that pays me. I wouldn't be beggin' ye like this, Ma'am, but there's a special reason."

"What's that?"

"Mowera. We're thinkin' of gettin' spliced, settlin' down like."

"I see. You want to rob me of my maid."

"Well, not for the present, Ma'am; but I wouldn't be honest if I didn't say I hoped to one of them days."

Felicity turned to Moon. "What do you think about it?"

"He's all right."

"You'll have to take orders from Mr. Moon here."

Ironjaw's eyes sparkled.

"I'll be proud to take orders from the man who can hand me the wallop he handed me. I just hope he'll show me the way he did it. It was a nasty jar, mate, but I don't bear no grudge. Let's shake."

The two men gripped.

"That's settled then. You can stay on."

"Thankee, Ma'am. I'll come round after lunch and explain the hang of things. And, say, I've brought along a China-boy that's a good cook."

"Good. Thank you, Jones. That will be all at present."

When he had gone she turned to Moon dubiously.

"Do you think it will be all right?"

"Sure. I know his sort. They're brutal from a sense of duty. Rough, but faithful as dogs."

"Anyway, I'm so glad about the cook."

They watched the three others depart. Standing on the beach, they heard the little boat chugging down the lagoon. They saw it clear the reef, then its sail go up. Slowly they returned to the house.

"Well, Mr. Moon," said Felicity briskly, "to-day you start on your new duties as Manager of my Moorea plantation. Let's get to work."

"I can't begin too soon," said Moon.

CHAPTER IX

THE GHOST

1.

FOR the next two weeks nothing occurred to mar the serenity of their lives. The Gridleys seemed to have disappeared from the island, or maybe were playing hide and seek in the bush. In any case, neither Moon nor Felicity gave much thought to that sinister couple.

And, indeed, there were so many tasks their minds were fully occupied. First of all, Felicity insisted on exterminating the land-crabs. She would have a decent lawn, she said; so, with the aid of a gang of delighted natives, she drove the creatures to their lairs, pounded them with crowbars, and sealed them in the tombs they had themselves excavated. That done, she had the ground hoed up, raked over, and sown with grass.

Every day she would go exploring on her estate, getting the "hang of things." On these walks Moon always accompanied her, and together they would make fresh discoveries and plan future developments. She was full of eager projects. Her imagination worked creatively on the wild material about her. The passion of the artist to achieve harmony and symmetry, possessed her. She would wave her fairy wand of wealth, and lo! all should be a garden of beauty, a patch of paradise.

Moon shared her enthusiasm. He, too, was inspired and uplifted at the thought of the task before him.

"I don't care whether it pays or not," she told him. "I want you to make it an Eden, a lovely spot, where I can come for three months every year and forget the world."

2.

He did not relax for a moment his vigilant regard for her safety. She slept in the same room as before, but he had heavy wire-netting nailed over the window, and doors made. The one leading to the veranda was always locked at night; the other, giving on the corridor, merely shut; but as he had the bedroom across the way, and awakened at the least sound, he had no fear for her security. When she was busy about the house he was able to attend to his outside duties.

One day he returned from the supervision of some Chinamen who were clearing land to find her poring over some drawings.

"It's the plan for the house on the hill," she told him proudly. "I made it; it's to be octagon in shape. Here on the ground floor are the kitchen, washhouse, servant's hall. A broad flight of steps, you see, leads up to the living quarters. The veranda goes right around, and the rooms are in the center. There are three bedrooms, a library, a sitting-room, a dining-room (in case the mosquitoes are troublesome), and a den for you."

"Oh, it don't matter about me."

"Of course, it does. It's my intention to give you the whole place one of these days—when I tire of my whim."

"No, no . . ."

"Remember, it's nothing to me, a mere bagatelle. Everything is comparative, you know, and I can give away cocoanut groves as a native can give away cocoanuts. Of course, I hope it will mean something to you."

"Everything," he told her rather huskily. "It'll be the first real chance I've ever had, and if I fail I deserve to be the hopeless wretch you found me, a beachcomber."

She believed in him. There was nothing about this man to suggest failure, no hint of weakness, of secret vice. If

he had failed it must have been because misfortune dogged him. So far she had not tried to draw from him his history. She wanted him to tell her of his own accord. In a way she felt responsible for the change in him. As she looked at him now, tall, straight, with a natural pride of poise, he seemed to radiate strength and energy. He had trimmed his beard and was very bronzed. His voice, too, had a sonorous tone; a bronze voice, she called it. Indeed, about the whole man there was something that suggested bronze —a firm, grim, metallic quality. She felt rather proud of him.

Suddenly she slapped the table.

"Mr. Moon, I'm sure I've seen you before somewhere. I'm always on the point of getting it, and always it eludes me."

He looked away so that she should not catch the haunted look in his eyes. He was seeing the poppy-field and the Calvary by the roadside. He drew a deep breath.

She tapped her brow. "Let me think. I'm sure it's coming back to me, sure. . . . Oh!"

This last was a murmur of annoyance. Mowera had entered.

"What is it, Mowera?"

"Madame, I think I like sleep my papa house to-night."

"Why?"

"Ghost him come last night. China-boy him see. Plenty much scare."

"All right, Mowera. Where was it?"

"Him see High Grove."

Curious how she had forgotten about the ghost. But now the moonlight nights had come round again, and they said it only walked in the moonlight. She stared anxiously at Moon, her lips compressed.

"You know," she said at length, "I can stand anything but that. I can't forget that dreadful night in the hut. I think I'll go away."

"And give up all your plans?"

"Well, I'm afraid, afraid."

"Look here, I don't believe it's a ghost at all. Leave it to me, and I'll fix Mister Ghost."

"What would you do?"

"Spend the night there. Lay for it."

"You wouldn't dare."

He laughed contemptuously.

"I reckon it'd take a regiment of ghosts to scare me. Let me try to-night."

"But you would leave me alone, unprotected."

"I'll get Jones to sit up and keep guard in the dining-room. Mowera can sleep in my room."

"Mowera's more afraid than I am."

"Anyway, you can trust Ironjaw. He's absolutely got no nerves."

"Well, not to-night. Perhaps it won't come any more. We'll see."

3.

They always had dinner on the veranda, and usually it was their happiest moment. They would linger, enjoying the cool breeze from the lagoon and watching the stars assemble. While he puffed at his pipe her cigarette would glow. Then they would discuss the doings of the day, plan the tasks of the morrow. Conversation would languish, revive again. At such times she found him constructively thoughtful and entirely sympathetic. Bit by bit she was getting to know him by heart. But though she drew him out in the realm of ideas, his past life still remained a mystery to her.

It was an hour she loved, that of the twilight, of the coffee and cigarettes. Penetrated by the dreamy peace of the scene, she felt herself becoming dangerously content.

On this evening, however, she rose immediately the meal was over.

"I won't wait up to-night. I've a headache. I'll retire now."

With a firm, cool handshake she said good-night; but he sat there for a full hour after she had gone, plunged in a peaceful reverie. Then, knocking out the ashes of his pipe on the edge of the veranda, he took a last look round the house. All was intensely still, wrapt in moonlight mystery. Yonder the grove dreamed in the silver silence, and the lagoon was a lake of pearl. With a sigh of content he went to bed.

4.

What was that?

A shriek . . . a shriek of stark terror lacerating the night.

With a leap he was at her door, had wrenched it open. White in the greenish moonlight she lay on the floor, and at the window was . . . a Face. It was huge and crumpled and wanly glimmering. He crashed his fist at it, only to bruise his knuckles against the stout wiring. There! It was gone.

And the girl! She had not fainted, but she was sobbing with fear. As he raised her she clung to him, so that he could feel the shuddering of her frame.

"Did you see it?" she moaned. "Horrible! Horrible!"

He soothed her as he would a child.

"Go back to your bed. It's gone now. It won't come again. See, I'll pull the curtain over the window."

Finally he persuaded her to lie down, but he himself spent the remainder of the night in a grim vigil by her door.

Next morning she was exhausted and did not get up for breakfast. At lunch, however, she appeared, looking very pale.

"I've arranged," he told her, "for Jones and Mowera to

keep guard to-night. Mowera won't be afraid if Jones is here, and Jones is afraid of neither man nor devil."

"And where are you going?"

"Ghost-stalking in the High Grove."

She looked at him curiously. There was solicitude in her voice.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Why not? I tell you, I believe this ghost's a living person. I don't think Captain Barbazo is dead at all. I'm convinced it's the old man in the flesh."

"But . . . the grave?"

"I'd just like to see what's below that mound of coral. I've half a mind to dig. . . ."

"You wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't I though."

He said nothing more. She lay down after lunch, but asked him to be sure not to forget afternoon tea. When he came he found her looking better.

"Well," he remarked as he sipped his tea, "I did it."

"What?"

"What you said I wouldn't do."

"You dug up the grave?"

"I did."

"And?"

"There's someone buried there all right. But still . . . how do we know it's the Captain? Well, maybe we'll be wiser to-morrow morning."

"You make me shudder. Listen! . . ."

It was the chugging of a little motor.

"I believe it's Major Hillcrest. I'm so glad."

Moon's feelings were more complicated, but he schooled himself to resignation. After all, he had enjoyed her society for two whole weeks. Let the Major have his turn.

Ten minutes later Hillcrest appeared, a long, lithe figure in immaculate white. As he leapt up the steps his eyes

were alight with pleasure. A delightful man with his dark, keen face, his flashing smile.

"What a splendid surprise! You're just in time for tea."

"Ripping! I've brought along some new books and mags. You know the 'Frisco boat got in."

"Gracious! There must be piles of mail for me at Papeete. Funny, I'm not a bit interested in it. Rather bores me, in fact."

"There you are," laughed Hillcrest. "South Seaitis. We all become like that. By the time we get the news it's old and stale. It has ceased to matter. Why get excited about things that are past and done. By-and-by nothing matters. Ah! You're growing like the rest of us. But how are you?"

"Oh, not so bad—considering."

"Considering what?"

"The ghost has turned up again. We've had a bit of a scare."

His face grew very grave as she recounted the happenings of the night before.

"That settles it. You're coming back with me. We'll have a lovely sail in the moonlight."

She was strongly tempted, but shook her head. She would not turn tail now she was feeling better.

"No, you stay here. Mr. Moon's going to watch for the ghost. You can watch me."

"I'd like nothing better—that is, except to join Moon in a ghost-hunt."

"No, you must look after me while he's gone. And now come and I'll show you all we've done and explain all we're going to do."

As he watched the two Moon realized what a fine couple they were. He sighed deeply.

"Well, to-night," he thought sternly, "I've a strong hunch we'll solve the mystery of old Captain Barbazo."

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET OF THE HIGH GROVE

TELLING Mowera that he would not be present at dinner, Moon made his way to the High Grove.

It was drawing near to dusk, and he was heedful that no one should see him. By circling widely round he arrived at the back of Captain Barbazo's cabin.

He did not believe the Thing was a ghost, otherwise all his precautions would have been unnecessary. It was some creature whose cunning he must baffle. Indeed, he still held to his opinion that it was no other than the old fellow himself. Those who had seen the phantom affirmed that it was hideously like the leper in his last phase. But why should he pretend to be dead? Maybe for fear of being interned. And why should he pretend to be a ghost, frightening folks in this crazy way? Maybe to keep them away from his hiding-place. And whose was the body under the mound? Moon had no answer to this. That afternoon as he dug in the atrocious heat he had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched. Straining eyes seemed to be on him, marking his every movement. Fortunately he had no need to go very far down. His spade gritted on a human skull, and that satisfied him.

Pondering on the mystery, he waited patiently in the cabin until the moon should be high. Gradually he saw its light filter through the chinks in the walls and flood the floor by the window. Outside, the forest was wrapped in the same ethereal enchantment. The silence was unearthly, like an echo of the moon's own silence. The groves had a

petrified serenity, every leaf like polished metal; and the battalions of the palms upthrust their glittering sabers as if in salutation to the radiant goddess. A moon-hypnotized world, tense, listening, transcendent.

So there in the glory of this godlike night he waited the passing of the hours. He had no clear plan. He would stalk the grove softly with eye and ear astrain, just as once in a Burmese jungle he had seen a tiger stalking its prey. Starting at the highest boundary, he would work downhill. There were over a thousand palms on the ridge, and they were planted with mathematical precision. The ground beneath was cleared, so that he could move without noise, while from every point he could command the radiating alleys.

It must be getting on near midnight now. What were they doing down in the house? Sleeping, most likely. He had given Hillcrest his room, and Jones was keeping watch in the dining-room. If the ghost tried any more tricks, two resolute men were ready to deal with it. But it was unlikely that the Thing would venture down there two nights running. No, he had a good chance of encountering it up here. So it was quite hopefully he began his patrol.

He had reached the furthest limit of the grove when suddenly his heart gave a leap, and he flattened himself against the trunk of a palm. There it was before him, the beastly Thing. Quiet as a heathen god, it was squatted in a pale patch of moonlight—the Silver Man. Distinctly he could see that hideous visage, corrugated, distorted, and—it seemed to be looking right at him, staring with a fixed and fearful grin. For a moment he crouched irresolute. Had it really seen him? Would he leap on it? . . . Even as he faltered it seemed to vanish. He rubbed his eyes, wondering if they had not deceived him.

More cautiously than ever he tiptoed from palm to palm, scrutinizing the shadows, exploring the vistas. Alas! it had gone utterly. Had he scared it away for the night? Was his watch in vain? He was beginning to think so when somewhere to his right he heard a faint tap-tapping. Leopard-footed he advanced in the direction of the sound.

Ha! he had found it again. Whatever was the Thing doing? It had a long, gleaming skewer which it was forcing into the soil by the root of a palm. Now it was withdrawing the object and thrusting it downward a little further round the trunk. This time there was some resistance, so the Thing struck the end of the probe softly with what seemed to be a small mallet, and the resistance ceased. Again it withdrew the gleaming object, and, working a little further round the palm, probed down once more. What mystery was this? With starting eyes Moon watched.

At least the supposed specter was unconscious of his presence. He would wait until it had its back towards him; then he would make his spring. With every nerve tingling and a curious tremor running down his spine, he crouched, panther like.

At last! It had pushed the probe into the soil and was tapping it gently. Its terrible face was turned away. Now was the time . . . now. . . . Moon leapt.

The Thing had quick ears. It heard the crackle of his feet. As he sprang it tried to withdraw the probe. Failing, it struck swiftly at him with the wooden mallet. But that instinctive sense of what was coming, which had served him in so many a battle, now saved him. He caught the blow with his clenched fist and closed with the creature.

What a mad strength it had! It fought with the ferocity of a baboon. He wrenched away the mallet, and

again and again he struck at its formless face, but his blows seemed to have no effect. Suddenly, as he felt his fists plunge into the foul flesh, a panic seized him. In his excitement he had forgotten that the Thing was a leper. *Ugh!* He recoiled with a shudder of aversion. He, too, would catch the loathsome disease; he, too, would become even as this beastly horror. Well, it was done now. He was attainted, but—he would destroy his destroyer. In a frenzy of disgust and despair he struck with all his force. He felt his bleeding knuckles sink in its neck, and the creature went down.

At least, it was no ghost. It was flesh and blood that lay under him. As he kneeled on its chest the moonlight revealed its ghastly glimmering face.

"Captain Barbazo! Rotten, putrid beast!"

Moon laughed like a madman. Again and again he struck at that crumpled face. With a snarl of rage he clutched the matted mane of hair and shook it as a terrier does a rat.

To his horror the whole head came away in his hands.

"*Christ!*" he screamed.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE GHOST HUNT

1.

FELICITY had not gone to bed. She tried to interest herself in the magazines Hillcrest had brought, but every now and then she would rise and look anxiously in the direction of the High Grove. Maybe behind that silver stillness dreadful things were being done. However, its screen of peace and beauty defied her scrutiny.

Hillcrest was a talker of talent. He sought to entertain her in really dazzling style, but gave up finally in the face of her abstraction. Just a little chagrined, he ended by accepting it with tolerant good nature. After all, it was natural that she should be concerned for the safety of Moon. So he, too, tried to read, and the night crawled reluctantly past.

Ironjaw Jones had taken up his position in the kitchen. He was poring over a month-old San Francisco paper. When he was reading he changed curiously. He put on a pair of spectacles and became at once softened and subdued—benevolent even. No one, to look at him, would have taken him for a hard-bitten man-handler. Every half-hour he, too, would rise and take a stroll in the direction of the High Grove.

Yes, the hours were slow, and on Felicity the nervous strain was increasingly apparent. Midnight passed; then one o'clock.

"I wonder if he's all right," she said, scanning for the tenth time that opaline serenity.

Hillcrest tried to reassure her, with conspicuous unsuccess; then, about two o'clock, Jones returned from one of his little sallies. He was panting with excitement.

"He's got 'im, Ma'am. I see'd 'em comin' down the trail by the taro patch. He's captured the ghost. Will ye excuse me. I'll give 'im a hand."

Without waiting for permission, Jones was off. Felicity wanted to follow, but the Major counseled prudence. Better to attend further developments. Half an hour passed in feverish suspense; then a heavy step pounded on the back porch. This time it was Moon. He was pale, disordered, and his right hand was bleeding.

"Well, I got him," he said in his deep voice.

"Who? The ghost?" asked Hillcrest.

"Captain Barbazo?" asked Felicity.

"Neither. Who d'ye think?"

They stared uncomprehendingly. Moon smiled quietly.

"You'll be surprised. The ghost, Captain Barbazo, is no other than——"

He paused deliberately.

"Than whom?"

"Our dear friend, Calvin Gridley."

"Heavens!" from Felicity.

"Good God!" from the Major.

"Yep. The supposed phantom was going round the palms in a most extraordinary way, ramming a very sharp machete among their roots. Haven't the faintest notion why. Guess as far as this place is concerned he's got no further interest in palmiculture. Anyway, whatever he was after, I jumped on him, and pounded hell out of him. Got this knock on the knuckles from a mallet he carried. It's nothing, though." He regarded the bruised hand contemptuously, then went on: "I was so darned busy lambasting him, I quite forgot he was supposed to be a leper.

When I remembered it fair made me sick. I had a prize picture of myself as a leading light in leper circles, and it drove me crazy. I yanked at the brute's hair, then everything came away. The whole face was made of rubber with holes for eyes and nose, and the hair was sewn on. It drew over the head like a helmet. Say, it's some mask that. I'll show it you. Terrible ugly, but damn well made. Smart man, Gridley."

"What did he do?"

"When he saw he was found out he was mad with rage. Like a rabid dog. There was foam coming out of his beard, and I was scared he'd bite me. He snarled and spat and cursed me in seven different languages. Then after I had given him a few more jolts he became more reasonable. Gee! When I found it wasn't a real leper I could have laughed for joy. So I kicked and cuffed him along, and now he's lying in the tool-house trussed with rope and tended by Mister Jones."

"Thank goodness you got back all right," said Felicity. "I was worried. Now I'll get some hot water and bathe your hand."

"Oh, don't bother, Missis, I'll do it."

However, she washed and dressed it for him, and when she had finished he said:

"Well, I guess all the excitement's over for the evening, and you folks had better get some sleep. I'm plumb tired out myself, so if you'll excuse me I'll just stretch out on this couch. Ironjaw's going to guard the prisoner till daylight."

"Won't you have some brandy?"

"No, thank you. I wouldn't have minded an hour ago, but now I'm just dead beat."

So they sought their respective rooms and lay awake with Moon's steady breathing in their ears.

2.

At breakfast next morning Moon broached the subject.

"Say, what d'you calculate to do with our prisoner?"

"If I were you," said Hillcrest, "I'd just dump him in that old pirogue on the beach and tell him the horizon's his, but Moorea's strictly *tabu*."

"Perhaps he won't go," said Felicity.

"Don't believe it," said Moon. "He'll be mighty glad of the chance. The fact is, they've already got to know down in the village that the ghost that's been scaring them out of their seven senses is Gridley himself, and there's a mob of 'em round the cabin now, howling like a pack of wild animals. They're mild as milk, generally speaking, but once they're roused they're hellions. It's taking Ironjaw all his time to keep them off with a Mauser. Say, they'd tear him to pieces if they could just get their mitts on him. No, the man hasn't got a whimper in him now, and he wouldn't ask for anything better than a chance to escape."

"Then there's Mrs. Gridley to reckon with," suggested Hillcrest. "I imagine he's not over-anxious to fall into her arms again."

"Well," said Felicity, "do what you think best; but please get him away as far and as fast as you can. The man poisons the island like a snake."

"I guess the Major's got the idea," said Moon. "We'll turn him loose in a canoe, and tell him there are lots of other islands on the map. There's no time like the present. Come along, Major, if you like, and we'll try to stall off the gang that's thirsting for his blood. We'll tell 'em the motion-picture man's come. That'll stampede 'em. The devils will become children again."

With some difficulty they succeeded in diverting the crowd, who were led by the father of Mowera, the chief Arootoo. In the shack they found Gridley cowed and

cowering in an abasement of terror which Ironjaw Jones did not go out of his way to appease. To tell the truth, Jones had been rubbing it in. Doubtless, he had one or two old scores to pay his ancient boss, and now he was doing so with interest. He drew on his memory of mutilations said to be practised by Apache squaws, and suggested that the women of Moorea had even elaborated and refined on these atrocities.

"Wait till old Arootoo's Mary gets her hooks on you, me boy. They say she's an artist with the knife, not to speak of the red-hot iron." Which, considering that his future mother-in-law was rather a nice, gentle old creature and leading *himine* singer in the village choir, was rather a libel.

However, there was Gridley groveling and groaning on the floor. He was naked except for a loin-cloth, and his lank, bony frame was plastered with some kind of white paint. When he heard he was to be released his relief was boundless.

"You won't let them get me," he whined repeatedly. "Only let me get clear and you'll never see me again."

"All right," said Moon. "You're a dirty dog and we don't want to soil our hands on you. We're only too happy to be quit of you. We'll smuggle you down to the beach and give you a canoe. After that it's up to you."

So, with fearful glances about him, Gridley half crawled, half darted to the lagoon. There he launched the waiting canoe and tumbled into it.

"Hold on," said Moon, "you've got to have some grub. It's a long, long paddle to Papeete, and it's me that knows it."

Gridley could scarcely be restrained; however, he waited until they fetched him a bag of biscuits and a jar of water. Then Jones clapped an old pandanus hat on his bald head.

"There! Get a helluva move on. The gang's coming back."

Gridley paddled furiously, but when he got well out his whole manner changed. Rising up he shook his paddle at them. His lips were drawn back in a venomous snarl, and his voice came hoarse with hate.

"Look out. You're not through with me yet. I'll be even with the lot of you. Wait and see."

Then he pointed to Moon with a trembling hand.

"Tell your mistress she's not seen the last of me. I'll come back. Then let her look out."

So raging and raving he made for the entrance of the reef, and even above the roar of the surf they could hear his shrill threats of vengeance.

3.

At lunch it was as if a cloud had lifted from their spirits. Felicity was extravagantly gay, Hillcrest almost volatile. Moon watched them wistfully. Again he thought: what a splendid pair! Either in the give-and-take of repartee or the sympathy of thought, they seemed made for one another. How long would it be, he wondered, before the inevitable happened.

"I suppose you'll return with me?" Hillcrest asked her.

"No, indeed. Now the trouble's over I'll be only too glad to remain here. For a moment I was discouraged, but that's past."

"There's still Mrs. Gridley."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of her. I'm really getting to love this place. Just come with me, Major, I want to show you where I'm going to have my vanilla grove."

She rose; then as she did so her eyes widened. An exclamation burst from her.

A man had mounted the steps of the veranda, and stood there irresolute.

"Coombs!"

CHAPTER XII

THE COMING OF COOMBS

1.

IT was indeed her brother-in-law.

"Yes, I've given you a pleasant surprise, I hope. I came on in a freighter. The Captain did me very well. You see, they're going to carry a consignment of our cars. Oh, I've done a fine business. The Arden Eights are selling like hot cakes. And now I've come to take you back. The 'Frisco steamer is due in two days."

She made a grimace. "I'm very well here."

He shot a glance at the two men.

"So it appears. But a change from the dullness and monotony will seem good to you."

"Oh . . . it hasn't been what you would call monotonous. I've half a mind to stay on a bit."

"But, my dear girl, everything's arranged. I've booked the staterooms. You're to have your old cabin."

There came into her eyes the obstinate look he knew.

"We'll talk it over later on," she said. "And now, come and meet my friends."

Gravely the men shook hands; but there was an air of constraint which Felicity tried hard to dissipate.

"So you've actually found your way here," she said to Coombs. "Behold, then, my famous ranch!"

"Yes, I caught the beastly little steamer, and they put me off at the nearest landing-point. Two brown boys paddled me up the lagoon. Here they come with my bags."

Two natives were crossing the lawn, carrying a number of suitcases. Coombs had a horror of roughing it. He

looked uncomfortable in his tweed suit, and perspired plentifully.

"Well, have you decided about going?" asked Hillcrest.

"No, I want to sleep over it. I'll decide to-morrow morning."

"Then may I wait another night? If you're going I'd like to take you back to Papeete in my boat. Rather a sad pleasure, I must confess. In any case, I'd like to see you off."

"You're too kind. By the way, you must make allowance for Coombs. He's really not a bad old thing; but, you see, he's out of his proper frame here. He doesn't show to advantage."

"I understand," said Hillcrest rather dryly. He had already decided that Coombs was not his sort. A business man, stiff, precise, dogmatic, Coombs was not likely to appeal to one of wide travel and sensitive culture.

"Righto! Well, I'll just hang round and kill time, hoping you won't go."

2.

Coombs felt better after a shower-bath and a change into flannels. His pink, perspiring face contrasted with his frosty little mustache and cold blue eyes. He absolutely refused to take any interest in his surroundings.

"Who's the big fellow with the beard?" he asked flapping his panama before his face.

Felicity handed him a convenient fan.

"Sorry. You know, the first duty of a hostess here is to offer her visitor a fan. The big fellow—he's my manager."

"And you stay down here with him alone."

"Why not?"

"Ah! is it entirely discreet? Won't people talk?"

"Let them. You know, I never worried much about public opinion."

"Hum! I say, Felicity, what about that little conversation we had? You said you'd have my answer ready when I came back."

From her big wicker chair in the shade of the veranda she looked over the jeweled verdure to the glimmering lagoon.

"I haven't decided yet. Please give me a little more time."

"All right. So long as you don't absolutely refuse."

He sensed a temporary estrangement. The spell of the islands, he supposed. When he got her back to God's country all that would pass. So it was with more or less contentment he retired to his room, damned the mosquitoes, and dozed away the afternoon.

Felicity sought Moon, who was laying out some work in the grove.

"Well, what do you think about my going?"

"I'll be terribly sorry, Missis!"

"So will I. I'm just getting interested. I really hate to leave, but I suppose there are other things I should consider. Anyway, I won't decide till to-morrow. How do you like my brother-in-law?"

"He—seems all right."

"Clive, my husband, wasn't a bit like that. He was all life and laughter and romance. Coombs is old-fashioned and punctilious. Clive was always chaffing him. A born bachelor, he called him."

"And is he?"

"I don't know. He wants to marry . . . me."

"You!"

"Yes. There are many ways in which it might be . . . expedient, as they say."

"I see. A marriage of expedience."

"Don't be horrid. No, I don't exactly mean that. You see, I'm fond of old Coombs. In some ways he reminds me

of Clive. You know, I adored my husband. He has always remained a sort of ideal to me. I was only eighteen when we married. He went to the war a month after, and was killed two months later. I'll never care for anyone again as I did for him. It's nine years ago now. Fancy, I'm twenty-seven."

"I'm surprised. I thought you were only a girl."

Indeed, with her lissome figure and her clearly-cut features she gave the impression of being little more than twenty-three.

"No, I'm a woman—quite an old one. You see, I must think seriously if I don't intend to remain a lone widow all my life."

At this point Hillcrest interrupted them. He wanted her to go to the village to see the nets drawn, so they went away together.

Dinner that evening was not the success it should have been. Moon was taciturn, Hillcrest subdued. Only Coombs was voluble. He talked of his trip, of his business, of the world of seething cities and hectic unrest. His nostalgia was aggressive. He had a way of expressing opinions with a finality that jarred on the other two men. Also he displayed a protective concern for Felicity that irritated them. All were glad when the moment came to retire.

In her room Felicity did not sleep immediately. For a long time she stood by the window, staring dreamily at the white, still mystery of the grove.

"If I only could make up my mind to go," she said. "But I can't, I can't."

3.

She was awakened by what seemed a smell of smoke. She sniffed delicately. No doubt a smudge someone had made, to keep away the mosquitoes. She dozed again.

What was it? The smoke was growing stronger. It entered her lungs pungently, and her coughing awakened her. With some alarm she sat up. Then she tore back the mosquito-curtains and sprang out of bed. Throwing on her wrapper, she lit the lamp.

Yes, it was beside her bed, rising up by chinks in the flooring, a volume of purple smoke. She ran to the door.

"Fire!" she screamed.

Moon had been sleeping on the couch in the dining-room. In a moment he was beside her.

"Where?"

She pointed to the lazy, curling smoke which thickened momently.

He leapt from the window and looked under the house.

"It's all ablaze," he shouted. "Throw your clothes from the veranda if you can. I'll do my best to put it out."

Hillcrest and Coombs were in their respective doorways, pyjama-clad.

"Fling your things out of the window," she cried. "The place is afire."

Coombs did so, but Hillcrest ran to her assistance.

"It's no use," yelled Moon from the outside. "The house is doomed. Better get clear."

Grimed and choking, he made a bolt to his desk and grabbed up his papers. He was the last to leave and join the others on the lawn.

The house made a glorious bonfire. It's light could be seen miles away, and the lagoon in front was a copper-glow. It burned so fiercely that soon all was over. The iron roof crashed down, smothering the flames and burying the smoldering woodwork. The Chinamen from the camp and the natives from the village had gathered in a great circle, over a hundred fire-lit faces, some dusky, some pale. As the roof fell in a shower of sparks a great yell went up.

Felicity and the three men were standing back from the crowd. With their little heap of saved effects they made a dreary group in the dawn.

"There it goes," she said. "That settles it. I go too. Coombs, I'm sailing with you."

"All right," said Hillcrest. "Let's get the things on board my boat. We'll breakfast there and get away at once."

Moon approached her as she was embarking.

"See what I found near the fire when I was trying to put it out."

It was a little woven pouch full of native tobacco and pandanus leaves.

"The makings. Mrs. Gridley."

"I see. Her revenge."

"Yes, you might have been burned to death."

"Ghastly. Well, I'm going away . . . to forget it all. But you'll stay, Jack Moon. You'll carry on."

"Sure."

"You'll not go back on me? You'll make my dreams come true?"

"I'll do my darn'dest."

"All right, and I'll come back some day to see my vision of beauty fulfilled."

"I'll try to fulfill it."

"Thank you. You're my good friend."

Standing on the beach he watched them go. Felicity stood between Coombs and Hillcrest. She looked pale and held an arm of each. But she released her hold of Hillcrest and waved to Moon till they swung out to sea.

She carried away a vivid picture of him, a solitary figure, tall, straight, strong. His dark face was stern, and there was that strange, stormy look in his deep-set eyes.

So he watched till the last glimmer of their sail, then sadly he turned to the work that awaited him.

BOOK V.—THE GARDEN OF DESIRE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE THAT MOON BUILT

GAUNT and haggard, Moon stood on the veranda of the new house. For months he had toiled with the zeal of a fanatic, urging others by day, poring over plans by night. He had forgotten himself absolutely, snatching hurried meals, doing with six hours' sleep, driving himself mercilessly in the broiling heat. Now he was fagged and weary, but there! the job was done.

So as he gazed seaward there was satisfaction in his sigh. The work was good. There was the house built of selected native woods, broad, spacious, handsome. A sweeping driveway of white coral, lined with young palms, led up to it. Round it the lawns he had cleared were beautifully smooth and green, but his shrubs and young trees were still tender. That was the worst of it. You can spur a gang of men to rear a palace before your eyes, but you cannot force a blade of grass to grow a shade faster than nature wills. Well, perhaps by the time she returned, his oranges and mangoes would be in fruit, his flamboyants aflame, his hibiscus alleys radiant. A bit of fairyland it would be, a garden of delight.

Of course he had had all the money he needed. Her orders were to speed and spend. She, too, was all eagerness, vividly imagining, tenderly dreaming. Perhaps she might be disappointed with what he had done. It might not fulfill her hopes. Anxious thought. She might not love it as he loved it. Anyway, he had done his best.

Ironjaw Jones had been a tremendous help to him. He had won the man's heart by giving him boxing lessons.

Jones had a hankering for the ring, and, taken young, might have been a formidable fighter; but his only training had been in knocking sullen seamen into shape, and now he was too old to seek pugilistic honors.

So his greatest joy was when he could get Moon to strip down and knock him about a bit. In the evening they boxed in the grove, to the vast delight of a native audience. Ironjaw would taunt Moon on the feebleness of his blows, till he would get a punch that changed his tune. After that Moon would lazily extend himself, propping him off. Jones could never get under that long left. For a finish, Moon would ginger up a bit, slam him round, drive him exhausted to the ground. And how Jones loved it!

Ironjaw was now married to Mowera. They had erected a little cottage on the site of the old house, and Moon boarded with them. Mowera was "expecting." Moon had a vision of a joyous Jones dandling a baby. No longer was Ironjaw the truculent bully of the Gridley days. By Moon's suggestion he treated his Chinamen with a genial consideration that made all the difference in the atmosphere of the camp.

"Say," he told Moon, as if he had discovered it for himself, "darned if I don't believe it pays better to jolly them lads along than to drive 'em with a club."

Moon's greatest anxiety was the thought of Mrs. Gridley. He feared she might burn the new house as she had the old. That would have broken his heart. However, it would have been difficult. The basement was built of coral and cement; the woodwork only began with the veranda. Besides, he had a close fence of barbed-wire put round the garden, and at night kept two native boys on guard.

Hillcrest had been awfully decent, coming over every month with a box of books and the latest magazines. He was always gay and stimulating, and Moon enjoyed his

visits. The two men got on excellently. Moon greatly admired Hillcrest, particularly his ease of manner. He himself was always afraid some evidence of his disreputable past might outcrop. However, his reticence protected him, and if the Hillcrest manner was beyond him, at least he could absorb some of its spirit. Then again, the intensity of his objective interests made him less and less self-conscious, and gave him a certain dignity.

Hillcrest always brought him the kind of books he liked. He did not greatly care for literature, but had a passion for concrete knowledge. One of his first purchases was an encyclopedia, and every night in bed he read it as long as he could keep his eyes open.

Hillcrest would always ask for the latest news of Felicity. Indeed, that was perhaps one of the reasons that made him come over. Moon got letters, but they were taken up with business matters. In one, however, she informed him, in a way too emphatically casual, that she would probably be married in the spring.

He did not like to say anything to Hillcrest about this, but the Major, with a glum, disheartened look, tugged a paper from his pocket and asked Moon to read a certain item. It was a New York society weekly, and announced the engagement of Felicity and Coombs. The wedding would probably take place in April.

"Did you know anything about it?" asked Hillcrest.

"Yes, she mentioned it in one of her letters."

The two men smoked silently, and made no further comment; but it seemed as if a fellow-feeling had drawn them closer. Anyway, their handgrip at parting was unusually warm.

One letter Moon had which gave him many hours of serious thought. After dealing with other business matters she finished up:

"By the way, regarding Calvin Gridley, I have made several inquiries as to his antecedents. The police authorities could give me no definite information, but they have reason to think he may be identified with a certain shyster lawyer who fled the country some years ago. This man is directly wanted for forgery and embezzlement, though he is suspected of other crimes. He came to San Francisco from the East where he was known by the name, probably his real one, of Spencer Simms."

Spencer Simms! Skeeter Simms! Could it be the same? What a surge of memories it released. If Gridley was Simms! . . . Oh, that he had killed the man!

For, now he thought it over, he was sure it was Simms who had opened the safe of the baseball club. Sometimes he had suspected McQuade, sometimes Gellatly, but never Simms. For it was Simms who had championed him, even defended him at his trial. That was the devilish cynicism of it. Now little things came back, and the fact that Simms had subsequently proved to be a crook, settled it in Moon's mind. It was for the crime of Simms he had paid the price.

Yet . . . could Simms and Gridley be the same? Why not? He recalled Simms—tall, gangly, with blue-jawed face and thick hair. Now he remembered that one time he had wondered if that hair were not false; beautifully fitting, but a wig. Evidently very few knew this, and Simms was sensitive on the subject.

Given his baldness, then, he would only need to discard his wig and let his beard grow. The disguise would be perfect.

Well, the thing was quite possible. Except for some talks in the gloom of his cell he had seen little of Simms. Gridley, too, he had seen little of. If there was nothing to confirm their identity, there was nothing to disprove it.

He was glad he had not known this before. He would have brought trouble on himself. Also, he would have been obliged to admit he had done a jail-term. He would have had to go away in disgrace. No. All that was past and dead. Jerry Delane was dead. He was Moon, always would be. And, indeed, there were moments when he almost convinced himself that he had always been Moon. The old life was so far away, and ever growing more unreal.

Yes, he was glad he hadn't killed Gridley. Fervently he hoped the man would never again cross his path.

Then one day came a letter from Felicity of a totally different character, short, but oh, how sweet!

"Dear Friend,

"I am not going to address you as 'Mr. Moon' this time, and this is not a letter on horrid business.

"Well, I have two items of news for you:

"One: My engagement with Coombs is at an end. I came to the conclusion we couldn't hit it off together—too much clash of temperament. Already we had several differences, small clouds on the horizon, but oh! what portents of storms to come! For one thing, he pooh-poohed this island idea; wouldn't hear of me spending three months on Moorea every year; wanted me to go to Cannes. I could see breakers ahead, so I calmly handed him back his ring.

"I'm glad it's over. I don't intend to marry again. I've been my own boss for years, and I don't want to lose my liberty. Besides, I'll never care for anyone the way I cared for Clive. I mean to be true to his memory always. So that ends that.

"Item two: I expect to pay you a visit soon. I can't tell just when, but I'll cable you.

"Yes, it's odd how I feel the heart-tug for those ultimate, indolent islands.

"Good-by, then, till I see you in the New House on the Hill.

"Sincerely,

"Felicity Arden."

This was her last letter. Did Hillcrest know, he wondered? He would like to tell Hillcrest she was coming, maybe already was on her way.

So, weary but happy, he stood there in the growing dusk. Soon there would be stars and a drenching dew that would freshen his young paw-paw trees. There was a great silence about him; the earth exhaled a delicious fragrance, and the lagoon was calm. Perfect Peace. . . .

His work was finished for a time. He could breathe more freely. And with the heartease that comes from worthy toil he was happy. He had found his place in life. Here he would grow old, gravely, gratefully.

He walked round the wide veranda to his little den at the back. It was all he had kept for himself. It reminded him of an officer's room on one of those boats where he had scoured the decks. He had often peeped into such a cabin and envied its owner.

He lit the lamp and stretched out on the bunk. Then he reached to the shelf above and took the first book that came to hand. It was Tennyson, and it opened at *Ulysses*. He read:

> " . . . to make mild
> A rugged people, and through soft degrees
> Subdue them to the useful and the good."

That was good. Work was good. Life was good. He would be the Telemachus of this isle, growing old like a patriarch amid these people.

He drowsed a little, and the book dropped. He roused himself again. He must undress and go to bed. So, half awake, he pushed aside the curtain and rose to his feet. Then he paused, staring at the doorway.

Felicity Arden was standing there.

CHAPTER II

A QUEER VISITOR

1.

MOON started as if he had seen a ghost; but it was a very radiant, laughing Felicity who came forward with hands outstretched.

"I thought I'd just surprise you. Oh, I'm so happy to be back—so happy!"

He was even happier, holding her hands, looking down into her face. Her frank, gray eyes were alight with joy; then he saw their expression change to surprise.

"Why, Jack Moon, you've shaved off your beard!"

Swiftly he put up his hand as if he too were surprised. Then he remembered. He had got rid of it immediately she had gone. He might easily grow it for her return, he had thought. He had always hated it. Now it was too late, so rather confusedly he rasped his gaunt cheeks.

"Yes, I'd forgotten. I shave now."

"I'm so glad. You remember, I was always at you to do it. A beard makes a man look like a roughneck, and I'm sure your face is too nice to be hidden away. Here, come to the light and let me have a good look at you. As I thought. A fine, Celtic type. Square jaw, grim mouth, fighting eyes. Now, where have I seen a face like that? It must have been in the 'movies'—Tom Meighan or someone like him. That must account for the curious feeling that I've seen you before. Well, what a shame to hide such a strong, honest face behind a beard! I like it, Jack Moon."

With some embarrassment he changed the subject.

"I hope you'll like the shack, Missis."

"I'm just coming to that. I've been peeping round, and I can't believe it. What miracles you've done! But you've worked too hard. You look worn and thin."

"That's all right. The strain's over. I can take it easy now. If I'm played out it's my own fault. You see, I'm a bit of a fool. I worry over things—delivery of material, so on. However, I have my reward if you're pleased."

"Enchanted! I'll simply die of impatience before to-morrow morning. Oh, there's Major Hillcrest. He brought me over. He's having them fetch along my trunks. You see, I'm going to make a long stay."

Hillcrest appeared, looking equally radiant.

"Ha! Moon, we've got her back, and we're not going to let her escape in a hurry."

"You mean, you won't be able to get rid of me. I've brought some nice frocks this time, and I've ordered a piano, and we're going to be very gay. Oh, I'm so glad to be here! I know I won't sleep to-night from sheer joy."

Moon knew another who wouldn't sleep. It was his Great Moment, the crown of his toil.

"I'm going to get Mowera," he said. "She's in the cottage on the flat. Married Jones soon after you went away. She'll be crazy with delight when she knows you're here."

He hurried down the coral driveway and returned with Mrs. Jones, who, with a cry of joy, ran to her mistress. Felicity gave her an affectionate hug and kiss.

"Why, Mowera!"

"Yes, Madame . . . " Mowera nodded proudly, and entered into details that made the two men retreat hastily. Then she showed Felicity her bedroom, her dressing-room, her sitting-room, her bathroom—an entire suite, in fact—lovingly prepared and waiting for her.

Felicity went from ecstasy to ecstasy.

"You're wonderful!" she said to Moon. "Oh, I wish it were to-morrow morning!"

2.

The next two days she spent in a prolonged rapture. Everything interested her, everything charmed her. Then gradually she settled down. A cook was found, servants engaged, the house organized. But there were many things, little and large, she still wanted, so one evening she said to Moon:

"I wish you'd go over to Papeete and see about the shipping of the piano and a lot of other stuff. I don't like to bother the Major, and the trip will do you good. You really need a change, you know."

Moon reflected. It seemed quite safe to go away for a short time. Mrs. Gridley was reported to have left the island; Jones and Mowera could be trusted to look after Felicity.

"All right," he agreed. "It will be better if I go. But I'll be back in three days."

So next morning she waved good-by from the veranda as a native paddled him down the lagoon to catch the little passenger-boat.

3.

It is the curse of the creative spirit that it will not abide tranquilly. It goads to expression. Artists are denied that perfect peace, the portion of plain people. If they could only be content to absorb the wonder and joy of life! But no, their rapture is allied to torment. They must reshape their emotions, project them on an artificial screen.

Felicity would have loved to sit in the sunshine and just seep in the beauty about her. But the ferment was already at work, and the absence of Moon quickened it. So she got out her water-colors and began to paint again.

On the beach in front of the house Moon had constructed a small wharf, and here under a striped umbrella she installed herself. Beneath her the lagoon lapped lazily, and she looked up a wide vista of hill and grove to where perched the new house in its garden of paler green. Settling down, she began to make an *aquarelle* of what she saw.

She was so absorbed she did not hear the clip of paddles till they were fairly close. Then she turned, thinking it was Moon come back. He was due that day. She was very glad; it was lonely without him.

But it wasn't Moon. The passenger seated in the middle of the canoe was a stranger to her, and as strangers were rather rare in Moorea, it was with some curiosity she watched him.

With great care he deposited on the wharf a large wickerwork valise; then somewhat awkwardly he clambered after it. She saw a man about sixty, with a thin, gawky figure and a neck reminiscent of a plucked fowl. Something in his black clothes suggested the clergyman. His hair was gray and rather long; he had a smallish face, fleshless, sallow, clean-shaven, and he wore pale-blue glasses to protect his eyes from the sun-glare. From his tight-lipped mouth his voice seemed to issue sideways with a strong nasal accent.

"Pardon me, Ma'am, but you don't happen to be of the Baptist persuasion?"

"No, I don't. Why?"

"Ah, it's a pity you're not a Baptist, then mebbe you'd have heard of me. I've got a big connection with the Baptists."

He sighed, and drew from his waistcoat pocket a card. She read:

"Rev. Hiram Brine,
"*Traveloguist.*"

"I hope you haven't come to lecture," she said. "We've only got natives here, you know."

"I know, but it's like this. . . . I'm collecting material for a new talk on the South Seas, and they told me over in Papeete that Moorea was the most beautiful island of the bunch. I felt I must see it. Then I heard that you had the finest place on Moorea, so naturally I concluded to pay you a visit. I hope I don't intrude."

"No indeed. Delighted to see you."

She was really thinking: What a bore. I feel I don't like this old fellow. However, island hospitality is proverbial, so:

"You must make my house your home, Mr. Brine. There it is on the hill."

"I don't like to bother you. There ain't a hotel?"

"No, we're not enough civilized for that."

"I'm afraid I'm giving you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all. Glad to put you up."

"I thought I'd just snoop round for a day or two, so's I could get some pictures of natives. I got a moving picture camera in this valise. That's why I'm so careful of it. Cost me two thousand dollars. I never let it out of my hands."

"Oh, no one will steal it over here."

"It's not that. It's so delicate. Wants gentle handling."

"Well, I'll put away my things and go with you to the house. I don't feel like doing any more work to-day."

The Reverend Hiram Brine looked singularly out of place toiling up the white coral driveway in his black coat

and hat and carrying so carefully his wicker valise. It was protected from shocks and knocks by a covering of thick felt, perforated in places. The native who had paddled him followed with a small leather portmanteau. Inwardly Felicity groaned.

"Looks as if I'd got the old chap for a week at least. Pity Moon isn't back. He should have been. Why isn't he?"

All that afternoon she kept looking from the veranda for some sign of him. However, if she expected she would have the duty of entertaining the Reverend Brine she was agreeably disappointed. Complaining that the passage over had been terribly upsetting and that he felt quite ill, he retired to his room. There he lay without a sign of life, a long, black form under the mosquito-curtains, with the wickerwork valise at his hand. It was curious how very quiet he was. She dreaded spending the night alone with him, and decided to have Jones and Mowera come up. Then, to her intense relief, Moon arrived.

"Dear me! I thought you'd missed the boat."

"I did—purposely. You see, the *Papeete Pearl* was coming over to get a cargo of nuts from us, so I shipped the piano and the rest of the stuff on her. We just got in. It was a devilish rough trip!"

"So I'm told."

"Who told you?"

"Ha! I have a visitor. A most charming and delightful man."

"That so?"

"Yes. Aren't you curious?"

"Nope!"

"Well—I am."

"Why?"

"Because I've seen nothing of him since he arrived. He's

yonder, stretched out like a dead man, with a mysterious basket valise that he won't let out of his sight."

"Who is he?"

"He goes by the name of the Reverend Hiram Brine—and looks it. A most depressing individual."

"What's he like?"

"Like an obscene bird. An ancient and hoary raven with the pip."

"A bird of evil omen?"

"I hope not."

"I guess I know who he is," said Moon. "I heard of him in Papeete. Gives talks in Baptist Sunday-schools. Chasing round after dope for a fresh spiel."

"On a platform he may be a whirlwind to talk, but off it he's a washout."

"Maybe he's really sick. It surely was some sea."

"He did look pretty green about the gills. I hope he'll be all right by dinner-time."

The Reverend Brine, however, sent word that he was still very poorly, and would they excuse him not showing up for dinner?

"I'm rather sorry," said Moon. "I'd like to have seen the old boy. What's all this about a mysterious valise?"

"He says it contains a very valuable moving picture camera. It's so delicate it mustn't have the least knock. That's why he won't let anyone handle it but himself."

"Might be an infernal machine—dynamite."

"Don't! You give me a shiver."

"I was only joking. Of course these cameras are fragile. What's he aiming to do?"

"He talks of taking some pictures of the natives in their primitive state."

"Not a bad idea. I'll get Jones to corral the crowd in the morning."

They dismissed the Reverend Brine from their minds and talked of other things till quite late. Moon was satisfied now that the shaving of his beard would not betray him. After all, on that afternoon in Brittany she had seen him only for a few minutes, and under very distracting circumstances. And besides, he was typical of a hundred tall, strong Irish-Americans. No, he was quite safe until he chose to tell her.

Would he ever? Why should he? It would only complicate matters. He was too happy as he was. Ah, how the great stars throbbed and trembled in the purple dusk! How sweet it all was!

So after they had decided to paint the house a pale cream color, to order a phonograph, to install a big library, maybe even to put in an electric plant, they each sought their respective rooms.

As always, Moon slept wakefully. About two in the morning he heard the flooring creak in the big hall. All the rooms opened into it. There was only a dubious light, but enough to show him the Reverend Hiram Brine stealing across the hall as cautiously as a cat.

Now, there might be good reasons why the old fellow should get up in the middle of the night and seek the garden, but there was no reason why he should be fully dressed and carry in his hand a large basket valise.

So, rising softly, Moon followed him.

CHAPTER III

BRINE TAKES A STROLL

WHATEVER was the old chap after?

Rising suddenly in the early dawn does not conduce to clearness of thought, and for a moment Moon had a confused idea that the Reverend Brine was really lugging out an infernal machine with the design of blowing them all to blazes. However, their guest did not pause, but descended into the garden.

It was the dim dawnlight when every leaf and blade dripped with dew. To go any distance was to get drenched. Not a time, surely, to enjoy a stroll. Brine, however, did not seem to mind. He went first in one direction, then in another, as if seeking something. There were no paths—just lawns and yearling trees. Brine in his black suit was easy to follow. Besides, the heavy valise he carried made his progress slow.

It was the valise that puzzled Moon.

"I could understand the old chap going out to get some fresh air, or to watch the sun rise; but to pack that grip along, that's what gets me. Well, I mean to see what he's up to."

So, keeping carefully out of sight, he continued to follow.

Then, at last, the old man seemed to have found what he sought, and he came to rest under the pergola.

Now the pergola was a special effort of Moon's, and his particular pride. He had constructed it from a picture

he had seen of an Italian garden. He had trained bougainvillæa vines over it, and already they were climbing high. Around were thick clumps of hibiscus and oleander. Later on he planned to have a fountain and a swimming-pool in the shade. It was the very heart of his garden, where all its beauty would converge. There was a bench on which the Reverend Brine dropped with a sigh of satisfaction.

Suddenly he jumped up. Good Heavens! Had the man gone crazy? He was stamping on the ground like a lunatic, his face livid and contorted. He shook his clenched fists in the direction of the house. What he was saying Moon could not hear, but certainly it was not a benediction. Indeed, judging from stray sounds, it was not language generally associated with a minister of the gospel. Then, just as suddenly as he had begun, the old man left off. Tremblingly he began to fumble at the straps of his valise. There was a feverish joy in his actions, and it was at this moment Moon judged it advisable to make himself known.

"Hullo, there."

The Reverend Brine started as if he had received an electric shock. He sank back on the bench and gasped.

"Pardon me if I scared you," said Moon.

"Yes, you did. My heart's weak. The least little thing upsets me. But, then, you didn't know."

"No, I sure didn't, or I'd have worn a bell to warn you I was coming. My name's Moon. I'm the manager here."

The Reverend Brine dipped into his waistcoat pocket and produced a card.

"Here's my name."

"Yes, I've heard a whole lot about you."

Moon sat down on the bench, and as if drawn by a mutual attraction the two men turned squarely and stared

at each other. For a good minute they were eye to eye, then the Reverend Brine turned away.

"Say, you're an early bird," said Moon.

"Yes, thought maybe I might get some pictures, a sunrise or something. I dunno. Took a chance."

"That there your camera?"

"Yeh."

"Mind letting me have a look at it? I'm mighty interested in them things."

Brine seemed confused, but he recovered himself quickly.

"Not at all . . . Why! bless my soul, if I haven't forgotten the key. Left it in my room, I s'pose. Well, well, how stupid."

"Too bad that. You see, I 'm real stuck on seeing that camera."

A long pause. Then Moon took from his pocket a plug of chewing tobacco and bit off a piece. He chewed at odd times, a bad habit of his sailoring days, and it was curious that the moment he had a quid in his mouth he seemed to revert to the rough brutality of the forecastle. Mr. Brine sat primly, his valise held tight between his knees.

"Say, Mr. Brine," drawled Moon, "seems to me, you and me's met before."

"Dear me! I don't know. Your face does seem a bit familiar. But I can't place you. You see, in my ministerial capacity I meet so many strangers."

"Let me jog your memory, Mister Brine. Was you ever in the East, and was you ever interested in baseball?"

Brine hesitated. Then curiosity got the better of him.

"Most people have been in the East, and most people have at some time taken an interest in our national game."

"Mister Grime . . . "

"Brine."

"I beg your pardon, Mister Brine. . . . You know,

at one time I used to know a fellow in baseball—Secretary to one of the League Clubs, he was. Name Simms, Skeeter Simms."

"Well . . . that don't interest me particularly."

Here Mr. Brine made a movement as if to rise. Moon laid a heavy hand on him, holding him down.

"Don't it? . . . You know, you're the dead spit of Skeeter Simms."

"I tell you, my man, I'm not interested in any fancied resemblance you may find in me to someone you used to know. Take your hands off me. You're hurting me."

Holding him by the shoulders, Moon swung him round.

"Listen to me, Brine. I want to tell you about this Spencer Simms, otherwise 'Skeeter.' He had to clear out of the States. The police wanted him on more counts than one. But there was one job he did, another man got lagged for, a lad called Delane. Did three years for it."

"But I tell you these people are nothing to me. I'm not interested in all this."

"You are."

"Why?"

"Because—*you're Skeeter Simms and I'm Jerry Delane.*"

This time Brine got a violent shock. There was no doubt of it. He gasped, and his face was a picture of both amazement and fear. Moon's mouth was bitterly grim, his eyes deadly with menace.

"I knew you from the moment I clapped eyes on you," he snarled. "You're oldened by about twenty years, but I knew you. Skeeter Simms had a black wig, you've got a gray. That's the difference."

With a savage clutch he snatched off the man's hat and wig and revealed a bare, bulbous skull.

"I've chased you round the world, Simms, half hoping

I wouldn't run into you. Didn't want to have blood on my hands. But this, I take it, is Fate. Now, I've just got to kill you, and I'm going to. Ay, if I swing for it, I'm going to choke you with these two hands."

Brine was recovering himself marvelously. He tried to pull away Moon's clutching grip. He found his voice.

"You're mad," he cried. "I admit I'm Simms. But what proof have you I did it? None. It was either Gellatly or McQuade. I swear I'm innocent."

Moon relaxed his clutch. The man was right. He had no proof. Perhaps he was rather glad.

"That's true," he said. "I've no proof. Except that I know one of these three did it, and you're the one that's turned out a crook."

He seemed in a quandary. Then suddenly he exclaimed:

"Let's see what's in that valise. I guess I can open it without a key."

But almost with a scream the man threw himself on it. He crouched over it, locking his arms round it.

"Come on, there," said Moon, tearing away his hands.

Then Brine's whole manner changed. Up to now it seemed as if he had been playing a part, but in his terror he became himself. Dropping his accent, his lop-sided way of speaking, he was the natural man, cornered, and fighting for his life.

"No, no!" he shrieked, "you won't touch it! You big brute, you can kill me first."

It was painful to see such sheer terror. Suddenly he started up and, breaking from Moon's grasp, with his valise in his arms he made a dash down the garden. He was running like a hare, and he had almost got to the gate when he turned and raised a hand clenched in rage. Moon recognized that gesture. Menace, hate, revenge—it was already familiar to him. He had not troubled to follow

the man, for closing in on him he saw the two natives who were supposed to guard the house. He gave a signal, and Brine found himself pinioned by muscular arms.

"Hold him, boys! Now I'm going to see what he's hugging so preciously." With a vicious wrench he tore the valise from the man's hold. Brine gave an inarticulate, gasping cry.

"Ha!" came from Moon. "As I suspected. It's not locked at all."

Bending over he opened the valise a few inches, then shut it with a snap.

"Good God!"

When he turned to Brine his face was terrible.

"Skeeter Simms, alias Calvin Gridley, alias Hiram Brine, the game's up. I might have let you go, but now . . . Here, one of you lads, I'll take your place—though I hate to touch this reptile—run down and tell Mister Jones to come quick. Hurry, there!"

CHAPTER IV

THE VENGEANCE

THE native was off. Moon held Brine spread-eagled on the ground, nailing him with his knee. The man flailed and lashed out with his feet, but Moon only laughed.

"I knew you from the first, Gridley, only I wanted to be sure you were Simms, too. As far as Simms goes, we won't consider that. But this here's another matter. I'd hate to have killed you, but I guess I can leave the business in other hands now. Hullo, Ironjaw!"

Jones came running. He was panting, and clad only in a *pareu.*

"D'ye know who this bit of vermin is, wriggling under my knees?" roared Moon. "Look at him, Jones. It's Gridley, Gridley without his beard, Gridley come back to have his revenge as he swore he would. And d'ye know what that revenge is? Just look in that valise there. Have a peep."

Gingerly Jones did so. Then he gave a leap back and snapped it close.

"*Rattlers!*"

"Ay, rattlesnakes. A coiled and knotted mass. He's got a wire cage fitted inside, and there's a solid wad of them packed in the bottom. Good healthy rattlers. About a hundred, I guess, ready to breed the moment he let them loose and turn this island into a perfect hell. We're trying to make a garden of Eden; Gridley's supplying the snakes. Just think of it, Jones. Snakes everywhere, and

us always thanking God there wasn't a blasted snake in the country. What a curse to fall on us! Don't ye realize it, man? Our little bit of paradise forever blighted, our loveliness made loathsome. Could you imagine a revenge more devilish?"

"The rotten skunk!" said Jones. Moon went on:

"Here, Jones, you take that there valise just as if it was the most precious thing you ever handled. Don't spill any of it, for God's sake! Go out to the deepest part of the lagoon, tie a big chunk of coral round it and sink it, sink it twenty fathoms down. But first take Gridley here down to the village. Explain to the folks there what he was after. You might even let them have a look at the dear things through the wire. Be sure to impress on them their particular brand of deadliness. Then . . . leave them to do the rest."

Gridley gave a convulsive heave. Shriek after shriek burst from him.

"Plug his mouth with dirt," said Moon. "He'll alarm the house."

It was too late. Felicity was running towards them.

"What's the matter? What are you doing to Mr. Brine?"

"Do go back to the house, Mrs. Arden. This is no place for you just now. I'll explain after."

They had raised the man, but he made a last appeal, and this time it was to Felicity.

"Mercy!" he screamed.

"He deserves no mercy," said Moon sternly. "Please go back to your room, Missis."

"Don't listen to him!" shrieked the struggling wretch. "Let me go this time."

Then he shot his last bolt.

"He's a crook, a jailbird! Don't believe him. He's not

worthy of your trust. He's done time. You ask him."

Moon swung her round gently and almost pushed her in the direction of the house. Dazed, frightened, she obeyed him, but halted at the pergola as if waiting.

"And now," said Moon, turning with deadly calm to the man who had accused him, "I guess, Gridley, this is the last time we'll ever meet. I'm not a squeamish man, but when these Mooreans get you, may the Lord help you!"

CHAPTER V

THE JUDGMENT OF AROOTOO

AROOTOO, Chief of the village of Raroora, was a man of much dignity, and never more so than when he was drunk. As a rule, the man who stands on his dignity has a mighty poor footing, but this could not be said of Arootoo. Physically at least his footing was impressive. Indeed, he was reputed to have the largest feet in all Moorea. Their soles were gray and horny, their upper reaches red and scarred.

Arootoo, clad only in a scarlet *pareu*, stood on his lawn. He blinked at the rising sun, at the glamorous lagoon, at the full-mouthed, roaring reef. He was suffering from a "hang-over," and regretted he had drunk the last of the rum. A hymn-singing old heathen, he had spent the evening at the church of which he was a pillar and prop; then, returning home full of religious zeal, had proceeded to get full of rum as well.

Two bottles he had accounted for, so that it was little wonder he felt less clear-headed than usual. However, his mental obfuscation did not impair his dignity, and in a stately way he moved from land-crab hole to land-crab hole, pushing with his enormous feet the surface soil into the mouth of each. Beyond making life more interesting for the crabs, it was hard to see what his object was. Which again suggested a certain confusion of mind.

Tiring of this little game, Arootoo walked sourly to his office. He had a bungalow built high on coral pillars, with a veranda all round and a corrugated iron roof. Its imposing feature was the guest-room reserved for distinguished visitors, and all visitors were distinguished. It had a four-post bed, the crimson canopy of which was

amazingly silvered with dead moths, and the mosquito-curtain imperfectly mosquito-proof. This bed was the wonder and pride of the village. Great authors had honored it supinely, and statesmen had endowed it with virtue. The Chief and his family slept on the floor.

Toomea, his daughter, a younger sister of Mowera, was eating her breakfast and combing her hair at the same time. In curious contrast with her brown skin she had yellow tresses. Somehow she made one think of chocolate and honey. A year previous to Toomea's birth a blond Swede had lingered in the vicinity, and certain conclusions had been drawn. However, it made no difference to Arootoo. He was prouder of Toomea than all his other daughters, and sometimes referred to her as "my little Swede." It's a way they have in Tahiti. They love children for their own sakes, and, though they may have a dozen, are quite willing to adopt a dozen more.

Arootoo passed into his office and sat down before that second source of wonder and pride, his roll-top desk. It had been presented to him on his accession to the chiefship, and he never tired of raising and lowering its slatted cover. To him it represented authority, prestige, the might of the law. He had only to open and close it a few times to restore his dignity. Its pigeon-holes were stuffed with official forms in the French language. He could not read them, but he regarded them almost with reverence. Above his desk hung a framed engraving of President Felix Faure, whose bluff and bulky person seemed of all the French Presidents the most likely to impress the native mind.

So as Arootoo, in his *pareu*, played with his roll-top desk and regretted the rum he had failed to reserve, there came to him Ironjaw Jones carrying a wicker valise.

"Morning, Chief."

Arootoo greeted his son-in-law genially. Maybe Jones

might have a bottle concealed about his person. But the manner of Jones was sober to the point of austerity. Arootoo had been educated at Raratonga and spoke English.

"What's matter with you, Jim?"

"Helluva lot the matter, Chief. Gridley's here."

"Him come back! Where he go?"

"We've got him. A bunch of the boys are holding him in a clearing back in the bush. Don't want to alarm the village. They'd like to lynch him off-hand, but I guess you'd better come and pass judgment."

"What he do now?"

"Do! This is what he done, blast his rotten hide! Just take a peek in this yer grip."

Jones opened the valise, half exposing the fine wire cage. In the bottom, coiled and comatose, was a gray huddle of snakes. Even as they looked, one extricated itself from the knotted mass, raised an arrow head and hissed venomously. Oh, the deadly malignity of its eye, the menacing dart of its forked tongue! Arootoo was in no state just then to be seeing snakes, and his short, grizzled hair seemed to stand on end. Jones shut the valise with a grunt of loathing.

"Him catch plenty eel," said the Chief, recovering himself.

"Eels be damned! They're snakes. Half a hundred of 'em. Rattlers all. And that devil brought them here 'specially to let 'em loose on us. Just think of it! In no time the island would be swarming with 'em. You'd have to wear boots, Chief; and there ain't in all Polynesia a pair of boots to fit them feet. But by the sufferin' Moses! d'ye realize what it means? We'd have been wiped out. Them things would make the place a holy terror, all the odds between heaven and hell. Rattlers! Gee Christmas! Want to have another squint at 'em, Chief?"

But with an instinctive shudder Arootoo drew back.

"And now, Chief, what yer goin' to do about it? Here's a human devil that tries to destroy you and all of us. They're waitin' for you to pass judgment on him. What'll it be? Something short and sweet, I reckon. Now's the time to trot out some of yer tribal dooms."

The face of Arootoo grew dark; the veins of his temples knotted, and into his eyes came the gleam of primitive revenge. The spirit of his ancestors was awakening, those forefathers who had made the island renowned for cold-blooded cruelty. A man of seventy, he remembered the days of human sacrifices, of unspeakable atrocity.

"I fixum," he said shortly.

"All right, Chief, I leave it to you. I don't want to know anything about it. Only, he don't want to get off, and if you hand him over to the police it's dollars to doughnuts he wriggles away. We've got him this time, but he must never have a show to bring off any more stunts as far as Moorea is concerned. Get me?"

"All right. I see he don't 'ave no show. What you do with him snake?"

"Drown them, right now."

"Hold on, I like see."

"No, the boss said I wasn't to keep 'em a minute longer than need be. You'd see nothing but a lot of bubbles rising up from the bottom."

"You not save me him valise?"

"Nothin' doin'. There might be eggs in the chinks or sompin'. I'm takin' no chances. I won't be happy till I see the whole thing anchored to the coral ten fathoms down. You get along. They're waitin' for you. Judge him good."

"All right, I go now. I judge him good, all right, by golly!"

CHAPTER VI

THE DOOM OF DOOMS

1.

GRIDLEY was incapable of further resistance. He gibbered with fear, like a man in the grip of some horrible nightmare. About him were grouped a score of stalwarts, their golden, sweat-glistening bodies girt with crimson *pareus*. There was an intense and eager waiting in their pose, a strongly suppressed excitement in their manner. As Arootoo approached a low growl arose. All eyes were bent on him.

Arootoo's dignity was superb. His tall figure towered over them. He was their Chief, and he felt they expected him to rise to the occasion. When he held out a hand for silence, silence there was. Then Arootoo began to orate. His voice was orotund, his gestures noble. His face was stern, but his eyes flashed. Fiercer and fiercer grew his harangue, and it was punctuated by growls of applause.

Arootoo waxed eloquent. He sawed the air and bared his teeth. His words were mordaunt, his manner menacing. The growl grew to a roar. Dramatically they bent forward. Thick lips were bared to show gleaming teeth, hands were clenched in rage and hate. Arootoo was working them up in fine style, playing with skill on their primitive passions. When he finished with a peroration of fiery violence, they rose as one man. Plainly they would have torn Gridley limb from limb, but the old Chief held out his hand. There was a great silence as he pronounced the Doom.

A William Fox Production.

THE FIGHT IN MAD MACARA'S BUNGALOW.

Lee Lawrence

Gridley groveled with his face in the dust. His shivers shook him. He writhed ignobly. Rough hands jerked him to his feet, ruthless arms propelled him along. His jaw hung, his eyes were starting. What were they going to do with him?

Through the bush wound the silent procession, till they came to the far side of the point that formed the eastern extremity of the bay. It was a deserted place, a dirty beach of bluish mud, land-crab riddled. The man at the tail of the procession carried a long-handled shovel, and he began to dig.

The hole he dug was deep and narrow. He scooped up the soft soil with fierce fervor, and when he was tired another took his place. When they had got the hole down about five feet, Arootoo held up his hand.

Gridley had watched them, his eyes almost popping from his head. As they seized him he cried out, but his screams were drowned in the roaring of the reef. They tried to lower him feet foremost into the hole, but he kicked so desperately they were obliged to lash his ankles with thongs of fiber. After that it was easy. He slipped down, all but his head, and they shoveled back the soil.

The sun beat vindictively on his polished skull. As his head fell forward his tongue protruded. Then the Chief pointed to the Mountain of the Eye, the giant goddess of stone, the genius of the island.

"We have been saved from a great calamity," he said. "It is only meet we sacrifice to HER in the fashion of our fathers."

An old man came forward, the oldest of the tribe. He was said to be a witch-doctor. He carried two large shells and a pointed knife. He bent over the head that protruded from the soil. . . .

They went away as silently as they had come. Arootoo

reached his office and several times manipulated the roll-top desk. He looked thoughtfully at his array of forms. Perhaps he should make an official report on the proceedings. But, then, possibly none of the forms would cover the matter, so he let it go.

2.

At that moment Gridley was not dead. Indeed, it took him hours to die, but mercifully he was unconscious most of the time. He could not feel the host of mosquitoes that buzzed and lighted on him, so that his flesh puffed bloodily. Then the mosquitoes were driven off by an army of ants.

Mercifully, too, he could not *see*. The sun blazed whitely, but to him the world was black, forever black. He did not see two white shells in front of him and on each repose the pupil of an eye—Gridley's eyes cut out by the witch-doctor, and served like oysters on the half-shell as a thank-offering to the Goddess of the Eye. Such the Doom of Dooms.

The land-crabs reconnoitered at a little distance. The soil simply seethed with them. They gained courage, scenting a feast. Two of the hugest seized Gridley's eyes and dragged them out of sight. Then a mass of the hideous creatures surged forward. Their backs were mud-colored, their bellies a vile orange. Their eyes were like jet beads on pins. Soon Gridley's head was hidden by them. It lolled from side to side a little, scaring them off. But after that it was still, and with tearing claws they covered it again.

Next morning when the sun rose it picked out a round white object on the blackish mud of the foreshore. . . .

A grinning skull.

CHAPTER VII

MOON PACKS—AND UNPACKS

MEANTIME, what of Moon and Felicity?

In silence they walked back to the house. He could not see her eyes, but her lips were tightly compressed. His own curved bitterly.

Leaving him without a word she went straight to her room. He shrugged his shoulders. After all, he thought, what did it matter?

He went to his den and began to fill a kitbag with his few belongings. Rather a heart-breaking job. He seemed to have come to the end of everything. When he had nearly finished, he turned to see her standing in the doorway.

"What are you doing?"

"Packing up."

"Why?"

"To go away."

"Why go away?"

"Well, after what you heard, I don't suppose you want me to stay."

"After what I heard? . . ."

"Yes. That I was a man convicted of crime."

"But I don't believe it."

"It's true. I've served a prison sentence."

"Then I don't believe you were guilty."

"I wasn't. But I can't prove it. There was only one man who could clear me, and he's gone."

"What do I care about that? My knowledge of you clears you. I *know* you couldn't be capable of a crime."

"You believe me innocent?"

"A thousand times, yes. If all the world were to point their fingers at you and call you guilty, I'd believe you innocent. No, it wasn't that that hurt me. It was that you never told me, never treated me as a friend."

"But . . . I was afraid. It must make a difference. That's why I want to go away."

"What difference should it make?"

"I have a stain on me. The very fact that I have been in prison damns me. If they know, people shrink. I don't blame them. It'll shadow me all my life, make me a man that wants to hide. It brutalized me in the past, and it's going to break me in the future. You've given me the only chance I ever had. But now that's over. I can't expect you to feel the same."

"But I do. It couldn't make any difference. If anything, I'll think more of you, pity you . . ."

"I want pity from no one."

"I mean—sympathize with you for what you've suffered."

"Then . . . you don't want me to go?"

"I forbid you to go."

He looked at her steadily. Suddenly his lips began to twitch, and there were tears in his eyes. At that moment he vaguely recalled to her someone she had once seen, but the recollection baffled her.

"Stay," she repeated. "I need you."

Blindly he turned to the kitbag again and was turning everything out on the floor.

"Heaven bless you, Missis!" he muttered.

Then he faced her, the old fighting look in his eyes.

"You've given me hope and strength again. You'll never regret it. I'll serve you body and soul to the end of my days. That's all I can say, and I can't say it very well. I'm only a bit of a roughneck, but God bless you, Missis!"

CHAPTER VIII

FELICITY SETTLES DOWN

FELICITY had planned to sail for the States in the spring, but strangely she postponed her departure.

Moon ascribed it to Hillcrest. The Major was assiduous in his attentions, doing his best, Moon thought, to win her.

Hillcrest was one of those who, though ever so simple, can never conceal that they are of gentle breeding. It declared itself in his clear, confident voice, in his easy assurance of manner. If he dressed during the day, it was usually in clothes a tramp would have despised. Even in the evening his trousers might be baggy and his tie askew, but the patrician stood out in him.

He was an ardent student, anthropology his hobby. However, he was well informed on many subjects, and took an interest in nearly all. His chief characteristic was his keenness. That and his cheeriness. His dark-brown eyes sparkled with intelligence, his face was lean and deeply bronzed, his teeth gleamed whitely under his clipped mustache. He was tall, spare, clean-cut. Always full of energy in a country where nearly everyone yielded to lassitude, Hillcrest preserved a self-discipline almost military.

"Such a tonic chap, it's like a breeze from the Sussex Downs to meet him." So Felicity would explain his charm; then she would add: "We're awfully good friends. He's been so nice I don't know how I should have got on without him."

Moon agreed; he went even further and grew enthusias-

tic in Hillcrest's praise. To him Hillcrest was a masculine ideal; but Felicity was thoughtful.

For her part, she easily explained her extended stay by the intense interest she took in the development of her garden. It grew in beauty day by day. Trees and vines were shooting up before her eyes; translucent leaves putting forth, oranges bronzing, and mangoes mellowing. The crotons were crimson and gold, the hibiscus mauve, pink, and snow. The bougainvillæa dripped purple flame, and the flamboyants were a radiant screen against the sky. Oleanders and frangipanis vied with each other in gorgeous color. The papias glowed with mellow fruit, the avocados bent beneath their green burden.

And every year this beauty would increase. The mangoes and the bread-fruit trees would spread their shade more lavishly; the banners of the banana plant glow diaphanously in the sunshine; the cocoanut palms soar in poignant beauty to the moon. Ah, what potential glory she saw about her! How could she ever tear herself away?

Then there were other interests. Her chickens, for instance. She had always been eager to keep chickens; now she had a large run of them and collected a daily apronful of eggs. She had a plump pony, too, plumper even than Hillcrest's, which crashed through the brush to meet her (a mina bird perched on his back) and ate bananas from her hand.

Then Moon had bought a fifty-foot cutter and put a small engine into her. He engaged the one-eyed Raratongan as captain, and they shipped their own produce to Papeete. There seemed to be no end of stuff they could send to market—yams, bananas, alligator-pears, *feis*, oranges, papias, mangoes, cocoanuts, pineapples. Once a week the Raratongan crossed, returning with all sorts of luxuries, including ice. In this boat Felicity had a little

cabin of her own, and she often made the trip, thus happily varying a life that otherwise might have become monotonous. In Papeete she would visit a growing circle of friends. There would be motor-drives and dinners; then in the evening the pictures or a dance. A whirl of gayety compared with the quiet of Moorea; but after three days of it she was glad to get back to the island.

Moon also built a studio for her in a gulf of greenery behind the house. It was perched amid the palms like an eyrie, a place of verdant shade and caressing breezes, and she spent much of her time there painting, writing, becoming an adept in tranquillity.

Curious to think that, while she was having everything she wanted, it was costing her next to nothing. The estate supplied most of their needs. Coombs had once calculated her income at about a hundred and fifty dollars a day, and now it was accumulating untouched. While she lived serene in her earthly paradise thousands of poor people in that mad world were fighting desperately to pay her an income she could not spend.

Something was wrong. Down in the village, when they drew their nets, the natives shared the fish equally. Hunger was unknown, cold unknown. Except for the diseases of the whites, sickness was unknown. Old people died, of course. What did they die of? No one seemed to know; they just died. There was no misery, no cruelty, no suffering. The stress of life's struggle was not written on a single face. They were always smiling, gentle, kindly. Generous to a fault, they loved their children and respected their parents. The ties of family were to them sacred. They were indifferent to money, and if they believed in the dignity of laziness, who could say they were wrong? Let the Chinamen slave and save; were they any better off in the end? A man has but one belly to fill,

and at the finish, be he rich or poor, he is only food for worms. So the natives loafed and laughed, but lived, ay, really lived. And people called them savages.

Such thoughts came to her as she sat in her eyrie perched amid the palm plumes. She began to see things from a new and disconcerting angle. Doubts assailed her. Why analyze happiness? Why put the gold of contentment to the acid test? Here she was happy, more soundly happy than she had ever been—though on the whole she had enjoyed herself. Enjoyment was different, though. . . . If only Clive had been spared to her, how they would have been like two children up here! But Clive was such a restless creature. He never would have permitted her this deep peace that was falling on her spirit as the down-drifting blossoms of the *tiare* covered the sod. That little white cross on Flanders fields, how faint, how far! She still cried at nights, but sometimes she felt happier after her tears.

A great joy to her was the buying of her library. She went over dozens of catalogs, selecting the best editions. She ordered with reckless extravagance, holding that you cannot pay too much for a good book. At first she thought of leather bindings, but Moon suggested that the cockroaches would eat them, so she contented herself with cloth. She ordered complete sets of the classics, and when it came to the moderns no book of any value evaded her. No field was left ungleaned. Soon her lists totaled over three thousand volumes, and still her peremptory orders went in. Boxes of books arrived with every boat.

And what joy she had in unpacking them, lovingly handling them, arranging them on their shelves! Her studio was like a three-storied tower. The top was for her painting, the middle for her books, the lowest, which was dark and cool, contained a shower-bath and dressing-

room. Here in the green shade of tree-tops, with the cool breeze flowing through the open windows, she came to love more and more her Tower of Tranquillity.

She sent for the most expensive phonograph, and had so many records they could play a new set every night for a month and never repeat. Moon used to feed the instrument while, stretched in a hammock, she lazily smoked her cigarettes. Down on the beach the natives could hear the thrilling passion of Caruso and Melba's golden ecstasy. All the greatest music by the greatest masters—there it was at their will and pleasure.

But there were still other interests; Mowera's baby, for instance. Every afternoon in the shade of a bread-fruit tree she would play with it, a little girl, reddish-blond, like Jones, and always smiling, like Mowera. She loved to hold its silky fatness in her arms. Somehow there came to her then the deepest peace of all. Ironjaw was crazy over his child. His whole aspect changed when he looked at it. He would go down on his hands and knees and bark like a dog, and the little one would chuckle with laughter. To see him holding in his arms what he called his "little lump of love and honey" was to marvel at the change paternity can work in a man.

Then, too, there was her ever increasing interest in the natives and their ways. She studied their language and interested herself in their affairs. She became a familiar figure at the village. There was not a family that did not benefit by her bounty. Soon they welcomed her with joy, and vied in their efforts to please her.

On the road to Raratoora there were houses all the way. On the verandas were golden-brown figures statuesquely posed; men magnificently muscular, women squatting and suckling naked children; lithe girls in white sarks,

and graceful boys in nothing at all. And they were so superbly indolent, so supremely content.

Sometimes she would mount the fat pony and splash through the frequent streams. She would meet bronze men carrying loads of *feis*—huge, golden bunches hanging from the ends of stout bamboo poles. The weight would be over a hundred pounds, yet the bearer had humped them for miles down a precipitous trail. Then she might come on a fisherman carrying strings of tunny and bonito. So between the fruits of the soil and the fruits of the sea, no one need ever go hungry. In this gentle climate no one need ever be cold. For shelter a grass hut could be made in a few hours. For clothing a scrap of tappa would suffice. Food, shelter, raiment for the taking, and to gain these men toil and fret and wear themselves into an early grave.

There was a woman in Raratoora who had seventeen children. She kept the village school, and probably supplied the bulk of the pupils. She was tall and fine looking, with a broad brow and an air of intelligence. With a half-apologetic laugh she referred to "*mes gosses.*" There they were all round her, about a dozen of them, ranging from a baby in arms to a boy of twelve, and not enough clothing among the lot for a decent scarecrow.

One little chap stood looking at her, erect and fearless. His mother bent down and kissed him tenderly. And she was still young enough to have half a dozen more. Maybe she would. In any case, she need never worry about their bread and butter, their shoes and stockings,

How simple it all was, how natural! They were like children, carefree, irresponsible, trusting. Why should they work when bountiful nature provided all their wants? Why increase their needs beyond the point where nature could provide? For them civilization was a curse. It would be their end.

How small the hands of the women were, and how daintily they used them! Their legs, though, from the knee down were large and powerful, the skin red, coarse, and covered with scars. Their ankles were thick, their feet large and flat. But take them from the knee to the neck they were perfect—round, full, velvety soft.

In places the flame-tree formed a scarlet canopy above, a scarlet carpet below. Even the air between seemed scarlet with its vivid, living glow. Clear groves of cocoanut undulated to the sea. The banana palms were pale against the dark richness of bread-fruit and mango. The drab shacks of the natives were drowned in sappy greenery. The verdure was so clearly defined that a long way off she could see leaf overlapping leaf. The shore line curved in cocoanut groves, and the crushed sapphire of the lagoon was framed by the ivory foam of the reef. There were scarlet, singing rivers, valleys luring and lovely.

But the swimming hole of Raratoora was her great joy. The natives love sweet water and bathe in streams in preference to the lagoon. There was a pool under the bridge that was always riotous with children. They would jump from the rail one after another, trying who could make the biggest splash. The girls bathed in their ordinary wearing frocks, letting them dry on their bodies. Their black hair hung lank on their yellow-brown shoulders; sheer joy laughed from their eyes. The boys wore *pareus* which persisted in coming off. Were ever children more gloriously happy?

One night Hillcrest took her to a *himine*. On the porch of the *himine* house about a hundred natives were squatted, the women in front, the men behind. In the lamplight she could see dozens of humped shoulders in white dresses, brown faces under fine straw hats. In the mysterious and

exotic *cadre* of the night they waited with eager expectancy.

Suddenly a woman's voice soared up, very high and sweet. It seemed to thrill and tremble for a moment; then, as if to support its frail melody, another joined it in a lower key. Now the two throbbed in a music full of wistful yearning. Then the melody quickened, took on fire and strength, and to its barbaric beat a third woman joined in, then a fourth. They were each singing their parts, and it all blended in a harmony strangely inspiring.

Now the men took it up. They, too, had four parts to sing, and their voices in mellow assonance supported those of the women. The song was in full swing; the singers inspired. They attacked it with fire and energy, accompanied by the measured thrum of stringed instruments and the soft throb of a native drum. It was a strange, wild melody, the like of which she had never heard before. The time was perfect, while at moments a poignant treble seemed to soar like a clarionet, rousing the others to a passionate rage of song. Then at the greatest moment of lyrical frenzy it all died away in a long drone of crystal melancholy, in which the voices of the women blended in one clear note.

Such was the singing she heard in a leafy grove under the tropic moon, and, looking back, how weird and elusive it seemed, something that haunted and baffled, mysterious yet rich with savage beauty!

CHAPTER IX

THE SPELL OF A TROPIC NIGHT

1.

ON their way back from the *himine* Hillcrest said to her:

"Well, I suppose you've heard the news about Mrs. Gridley?"

"No."

"She's married again."

"Really! Whom?"

"Mati, the famous Mati."

"And who is Mati?"

"The most immoral man in Tahiti, and the most adorable cook in Polynesia."

"What a fascinating combination! I don't wonder Mrs. Gridley couldn't resist him."

"He couldn't resist her, apparently. There's more in this than meets the eye."

"Where are they?"

"Living in Papeete. He keeps a restaurant, specializes in native food: fish pickled in lime-juice, salad of heart of young cocoanut. His curried sea-centipedes are delicious, and his papia fritters a dream. You must let me take you there some time."

"Mrs. Gridley might poison me."

"Oh, no danger. I don't think you have anything to fear now so far as Mrs. Gridley is concerned. Anyway, Mati's a decent chap, with a wholesome respect for the

law. But I can't help wondering why the dickens he married that woman."

They found Moon poring over his accounts. Not only was he making the place support itself, but making a profit as well. He was very proud of this, for he had had no previous business experience. They made him call it a day, however, and, sitting on the veranda over a nightcap, all three talked till drowsiness overcame them.

2.

It was a week later. The sky glittered like a coat of mail. The garden, richly mysterious, exhaled the cloying perfume of the *tiare*. Moon and Felicity sat alone on the veranda, silent, dreaming.

She was thinking of Mowera's baby. That woman with the seventeen children, too. Would *she* ever have children? Probably not. It seemed a shame, for she loved them. Her life would be a failure without them. Why should children depend on marriage? It seemed more wrong to marry and not to have children than to have them without marrying. She half envied those native girls who bore freely and gladly, and everyone was pleased. Then her thoughts took another direction.

"Wouldn't it be terrible," she remarked, "if the United States bought Tahiti? Just think, the country would go dry, and hundreds of earnest ladies with horn spectacles would hoist on high the banner of reform. With good roads, hygiene, morality, all the primitive lure of the island would vanish. What a loss to art. Pity that art should owe so much to dirt and laziness and lax morality, but an Americanized Tahiti is unthinkable. We've got the French to thank for something after all."

Moon was silent. In such musings he did not follow her.

He was all for law, and down on laxity. His austere mind conceived a reformed and remodeled Tahiti without dismay.

"You don't always believe what you say," he remarked.

"Why should I? It's just as stupid to believe the things one says as it is to say the things one believes. It's not so important to think truly as to keep on thinking. But will you ever understand me, Jack Moon?"

"I don't believe I ever will."

She studied him thoughtfully. She noted his long, lithe frame, his big, well-formed hands, his unusual stature and strength. His jaw was clean-cut and square, his chin determined, his lips severely cut. She loved the way his hair curled from the roots, and that stormy look in his eyes. He was all the word "*man*" implies. That meant a lot. She wondered what sort of children she and Moon could have. What a pity he, too, would never have any! Other men in his place would likely have bastards by the score. But Moon wasn't that sort. She was sure he couldn't bear to see his image stamped on some squirming half-caste brat. She understood him, though he would never understand her. He was a simple, elemental man; she a complex, sophisticated woman. Yet what a wonderful child they might have!

"Will you ever marry, Jack Moon?" she demanded suddenly.

She was surprised at the harsh way in which he answered.

"Never."

"It seems as if you had some reason for 'nevering' so emphatically."

"I have."

"You're awfully mysterious to-night."

"No, Missis. I think it's you that's queer."

"Am I? . . . Perhaps. . . ."

She was thinking that if she were a poor simple girl she would seek no better mate than Jack Moon. If he and Hillcrest stood together she would unhesitatingly choose Moon. But, being rich and cultivated, she would just as surely choose Hillcrest. The only difference was that as a rich woman she would regret Moon, while as a poor one she would never regret Hillcrest.

"You never told me your real name," she said at last.

"No, but . . . I will if you wish."

He was wishing she would wish. However, she said:

"No, don't. It doesn't matter. Your present one's all right. I'm used to it, and it suits you. Let it be Jack Moon to the end of the chapter. I can't help observing, however, that I've told you a great deal of my life, and you've told me nothing of yours."

"There are things one can't tell. . . ."

"More mystery. Listen! Do you like me?"

He rose suddenly and stared over the veranda-rail into the darkness.

"Yes, of course I do"—huskily.

"A little bit?"

"Ye-es."

"More than a little bit?"

He turned savagely. "You're mocking me, you're torturing me."

At that moment he longed to catch her to him, and from the bottom of her heart she wished he would. If he did, what would she do, she wondered? Ah! who could tell? She went to his side.

"I'm going away pretty soon," she said ruefully.

"Are you?"

"Yes. This place is getting too strong a hold on me. I must break the spell."

"What spell?"

"This . . . this island of passion, this garden of desire. I'm becoming the worst lotus-eater of them all. It's filling my life, cursing me with content. I must go. You know I must, don't you? Will you be sorry?"

She came very close to him, and he could feel all the fierce seduction of her appeal. It was more than he could bear. He turned to crush her to him, regardless of the danger, when there was a movement in the darkness, and a man mounted the steps.

CHAPTER X

THE TREASURE SEEKER

1.

THE newcomer was a half-breed, a stocky man with a roguish eye and a rolling belly. He advanced, twisting a panama and bowing profoundly.

"I'm Mati," he said. "Maybe you have hear of me."

"Everybody has, I think," said Felicity. "Pray sit down, Mr. Mati."

A word or two as to Mati. Writers have chronicled his vices and smacked their lips over his cuisine. Probably the most irresponsible man on the island, he seemed to take life as a huge joke. Money matters bewildered and bored him. As to his lack of morals, at one period he ran a notorious hotel in Papeete. These were the Times—halcyon days, hectic nights; revels that developed into orgies. And over all Mati moved like a gleeful god, flower-wreathed, his dark eyes agleam with lust and laughter. On his broad veranda the music of guitar and accordion mingled with the shrieks of the hula-hula dancers, while in his salon, with its cracked piano and carved teak chairs, the rum-punch flowed as from an inexhaustible source.

But Mati was no longer the Sultan of a harem, the sovereign of a saturnalian realm. Now he was the esteemed and amiable host of the best restaurant in Papeete. His feasts were proverbial, and over them he beamed like a benevolent deity, charging only half what he ought.

Such was the new husband of Mrs. Gridley, and, now

sitting in a wicker arm-chair and twiddling his panama hat, this was the tale he told them.

"Missis Mati no come Moorea. She stop Tahiti all time now. She send me. I come. Speak you very nice. Me good man. You very good me."

They wondered what was coming. Mati went on: "Ole Captain Barbazo he no like Gridley. He no like him girl. No like person. He like only pearl; catch plenty pearl, heap big, very much money. Gridley he marry him girl. He think he catch all pearl. Ole Captain he fool everybody. He lock pearl steel box, hide somewhere."

Mati paused to light a cigarette.

"Mrs. Gridley she plenty sorry. She say she's father: 'You don't tell me now, you tell sometime.' He say he tell before he die. If Mrs. Gridley very good him he tell; no good, he never tell."

Mati paused again to relight his cigarette. His listeners were following him eagerly.

"Mrs. Gridley she take good care him. Fetch him all time food. By-and-by he come die she say: 'Now you tell me where you hide pearl.' He laugh long time. He say: 'I bury box one foot down.' She say: 'Where you bury him box?' He laugh some more. He say: 'Pearl very bad. I kill plenty mans for catch pearl, now I die leper. All same curse. You catch pearl you catch curse too.' She say: 'Never mind. You tell me quick. You go die very soon.' He say: 'Well, I tell you. . . .'"

Mati looked vaguely into the mysterious night. Then he made a wide, sweeping gesture.

"Ole man Barbazo he wave hand so. . . . He say: 'I plant pearl one foot down in steel box in High Grove, beside root palm.' She say: 'Where palm? Plenty palm High Grove. One thousand palm. What palm?' He laugh some more. 'I not remember. One palm. You look

you find him, you catch steel box one foot down. . . . Big palm. . . . Plenty pearl. . . . Too much kill catch pearl. . . . Curse, blood, hell. . . .' Old Cap Barbazo he laugh once more, cry out very loud, fall back dead. That's all."

There was a silence. Mati was regarding them blandly.

"Then," said Felicity, "you mean the pearls are there now?"

Mati nodded.

"But there are, as you say, over a thousand palms in the High Grove, all alike as peas."

"Yes. Gridley think he find. He go out many night."

"Ah, that's why he was piercing the soil all round the roots," said Moon.

"Yes, he heap 'fraid someone find pearl. He pretend him ghost. He try scare all feller."

"Now we understand," cried Felicity. "So the pearls are there, you think, hidden in a steel box under a certain big palm in the High Grove. What do you want to do about it? I don't want the things. I recognize that they belong to you, or, rather, to your wife. But how are you going to find them? I'm not going to have you uprooting all my palms, and I don't want strange people treasure-hunting on my estate."

"People not know. Him secret. Mrs. Gridley send me you. She say no good fight any more. You help her find pearl, she give you share."

"I'll never let her put her foot on this place again."

"No, she stay Tahiti. I come. I look. I think maybe you give me permission."

"Yes, but how do you propose to do it? It's like finding a needle in a haystack."

"I find needle in haystack all right," said Mati eagerly "White man Papeete he tell me. He make me what you call—divine rod."

"Divining rod! How delicious!"

"Yes, I fetch it with me."

He showed them. Instead of boring the ground with instruments in hope of striking the box, Mati was going to use a magnetic needle. Very sensitive and delicately poised, it responded instantly to the presence of steel or iron. Mati's idea was to go over the ground foot by foot with his instrument. When he reached the spot where the steel box was concealed he believed that the needle would instantly dip down.

"Very simple," commented Felicity. "I wonder Gridley never thought of it."

"You let me try?"

"As long as my manager here doesn't object."

"It's all right with me," said Moon.

"Of course," went on Felicity, "I don't want a share. You can go right on with your funny apparatus, and good luck to you."

With profuse thanks Mati hurried away, and the next morning the hunt for the treasure began.

2.

On the following day Hillcrest arrived unexpectedly. Felicity welcomed him with pleasure, but there was a quietness in his manner that puzzled her.

"He's going to surprise me," she thought, watching him closely.

But if Hillcrest had something up his sleeve he did not immediately reveal it, and all three sat down to lunch. They told him of Mati and his scheme for finding the treasure. At first he laughed, then he looked serious.

"Jolly good idea. Wouldn't be surprised if it worked. Wonder no one ever thought of it before."

"No one knew about the buried pearls but Gridley and his wife."

"Well, by now I expect a good many people know. Mati's the last man to keep his mouth shut. You may have a whole herd of treasure-seekers over before long."

"I'll keep 'em off with a shotgun," growled Moon.

"I trust you'll have no trouble. By the way, I hear the French Government are cleaning up the beach. The beachcombers have been warned—work, clear out, or go to prison."

"What are they doing?"

"Most of them will get out. A good many will attempt to wangle a passage on the next boat. Some will try to make the Marquesas or the Paumotos."

"I hope none of them will come to Moorea," said Felicity.

Hillcrest shrugged his shoulders. "I hope not."

"Last time I was in Papeete," said Moon, "I saw some of Macara's gang. They're stronger than ever, I believe. They didn't know me without my beard, though that little fellow Smeet stared hard enough. Gave me a hard luck story and bummed a dollar."

"Do you mean to tell me that big black ruffian is still unhung?" demanded Felicity.

"I guess so. I haven't seen him, though."

"Anyway," said Hillcrest, "I've got to thank these beggars for my introduction to you two."

"And we've got to thank you for our lives."

"Oh, there was no risk."

"Wasn't there . . . well, you'd have taken it if there had been."

"Of course. . . . I say, if you've finished, come and let's see Mati at work."

Moon excused himself, so Hillcrest and Felicity went on

to the High Grove. They found Mati testing the ground foot by foot round each palm, and when he was finished marking the butt with a charcoaled cross. He greeted Hillcrest genially.

"Hullo, Major! What you do here?"

"Come to see you, Mati. How many palms have you done?"

"About twenty. I think I do fifty one day."

"At that rate," said Felicity, "it will take you over three weeks."

"Oh, no. I think I find him very soon. Maybe to-day, maybe to-morrow, maybe next week."

"Maybe next palm," said Hillcrest. "Well, we won't embarrass you by watching your operations. I wish you luck. May your needle dip before the day's out."

"Thank you, Major. If I find him I give you big dinner Papeete."

"Nice chap, Mati," said Hillcrest. "If he doesn't strike it pretty soon, though, I won't have the pleasure of that dinner."

"There!" said Felicity, "I knew you were keeping something back. Out with it. What's the excitement?"

"Oh, nothing particular. I'm going away on the next boat."

"Going away! . . ." She looked at him in startled amazement. "Where?"

"Home. To England."

"Why?"

"I've just had a cable. My brother's dead."

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Well, it isn't as if we were very good friends. As a matter of fact, we'd quarreled. However, that doesn't alter things. I'm sorry, too, though I'm not going to

make a fuss about it. And I'm also sorry for another reason—it breaks up my life here."

"You mean you're obliged to go back?"

"Yes. Duty, the estates, so on."

"Then you are the heir?"

"He was a bachelor like myself."

"And . . . now you are Sir Guy Hillcrest?"

"By Jove! So I am. Sorry. Can't help it, you know."

She gave him her hand in congratulation.

"I'm so glad for you."

He kept hold of her hand, going on a little breathlessly.

"I wish I could say I was glad, too, but I can't, can I? Leaving all this, maybe forever. Never seeing it again . . . perhaps never seeing you again. Oh, Mrs. Arden, won't you understand? I love you and I want you. Won't you come back with me, as Lady Hillcrest? There's that Tudor Manor—such a ripping old place. How you would grace it! Think, my dear, you've got to marry again some time, and, by Jove! I believe I could make you happy."

"I believe you could, more than anyone else," she admitted rather sadly.

"Well, what's the decision?"

"I was thinking. . . . Don't rush me. Remember this is pretty sudden."

"Why do you look so sad?"

"I was thinking of all the fine sentiment you expressed the other day."

"The lotus-eater? Ha! Circumstances alter one's viewpoint."

"But . . . I don't want to give up all this."

"We can come back every year if you like."

"Yes, that might do. Then . . . I was also thinking . . ."

"What?"

"You said I *must* marry again. I don't see that."

"Well, it seems natural. A woman's destiny is to be a wife, a mother."

"Yes, I admit that. . . . Then, too, I was thinking of Clive. I'll always give him first place in my heart. I'm awfully fond of you, you know. You're such a dear. But all I could give would be a great affection, not the rapture of a Juliet."

"I understand. I'm no sentimental stripling. I know that rapture passes and affection takes its place. That's all any of us can hope for. Well, what do you say?"

Like one in a dream she looked fixedly before her.

"Listen," he went on. "Perhaps I've been presumptuous, but I've come prepared. Let me put this on your finger."

He took from his pocket a magnificent ring composed of a huge black pearl. She let him slip it on. When she looked down and saw it beside her plain wedding ring she burst into tears.

3.

Hillcrest had gone in a state of delirious joy. He was returning to Papeete to reserve cabins on the *Raratonga*, which was due in three days. He had begged her to marry him at once, but she had refused. She would only consent to a six months' engagement. She would go to her friends; he would return to his home. He would come back to America in six months' time, and they would be married in Boston. Meantime they could make the trip East together.

At dinner she was very grave and silent. She was not wearing her new ring. She felt there would be time enough

for that when Hillcrest came on the morrow. After dinner she went to her usual chair on the veranda. It was a spacious night, and the sky was encrusted with stars.

"Shall I play the phonograph for you?" asked Moon.

"No, not to-night, thank you."

"You're very silent."

"Yes, I'm sad."

"Why, Missis, might I ask?"

"Because . . . I'm going away."

"Going away!"

"Yes, leaving all this. I feel as if it's the end of the happiest time I've ever known."

"Then why go?"

"Because I've promised to marry the Major. He proposed to me to-day, and I accepted him. We're going to live in England."

For a long time Moon was silent. She could not see his face for the darkness. When at last she heard his deep grave voice she thought it trembled a little.

"Yes, I've been expecting it. I saw he cared for you. Well, he's the finest fellow in the world and should make you awful happy. I'm glad it's him."

She broke out petulantly: "That's as much as to say it had to be someone. Oh, you make me tired, you men! You think that a woman simply has to marry one of you. I've had my freedom now for nine years, and I bet I'll never be so happy again as I've been. And I've got to give up all this life I love, and go back to butlers and calls and dinner-parties and that society stuff I hate. Don't you pity me?"

"But you don't have to."

"Yes, I do. It seems my duty. I can't always go on like this. I must be reasonable."

Tears were smarting in her eyes. She snapped irri-

tably: "You stay here, Jack Moon. You've got the best of it. Don't return to that beast of a world."

"I hope you'll come back sometimes," said Moon gently.

"Indeed I will. Every year. You must make the place adorable for me. Make me love to visit it."

"I'll try, Missis. All I ask is to serve you. That's my life as I see it, my life to the very end. I'll be perfectly happy like that."

"Perhaps happier than I'll be. Well, I've told you now, and I'm tired. Good-night."

She went away without shaking hands, but for a long time he sat quite still in his place. Now that the thing he had dreaded was over, a great peace had come to him.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRANGE BOAT

NEITHER of them slept a wink all night. Moon rose early and left for a distant corner of the plantation. When he returned for lunch, she was awaiting him. She looked pale and tired.

"You're late," she said listlessly.

"Yes, I had to go to the river. I've some Chinamen there clearing land."

"Where's Jones?"

"I gave him a couple of days off. There's a *himine* up at Mareharepa, and nearly all the village have gone. They've taken that big war canoe. Pity you didn't see that. It was a great sight. I let Jones take the cutter. Mowera wanted to go so badly."

Just then he caught sight of her ring which she had decided to put on.

"What a glorious pearl! I never saw a finer."

"Isn't it? He bought it from a Paumotan chief."

"Wonderful! When's he coming back?"

"To-night. But he'll probably be late. He has much a lot to do."

"Mati hasn't struck it yet, has he?"

"No; he's working hard, though. I wish he would strike it before I go. I'd like to see those famous pearls. I might match enough for a necklace."

"When are you thinking of going?"

"Day after to-morrow. Just in time to catch the steamer. You must take me over in our boat."

"Yes, I thought of it. I'd like to."

After lunch he smoked a second cigar. He was going to work over his accounts that afternoon, and was in no particular hurry. Half enviously she watched him.

"Lucky man, staying here. You're getting the best of it."

"I'll be terribly sad when you're gone, Missis. I don't like to think of that."

"Don't you? Well, it wouldn't take very much to make me stay. . . . Why, what's that sail out on the sea?"

"Can't be the Major coming back already."

"Get the glasses and look," she said.

He stood up, peering a long time at the boat that was tacking off the reef.

"No, it's a smaller boat than his. Seems full of men, too."

"Well, they'll probably swing in. We'll see them soon enough."

About half an hour later they watched the same boat coming up the lagoon. It was an open boat, and four men were rowing. It passed the beach below the house, and, rounding the point, made for the next small bay.

"It's strange. There must be about a dozen men in her."

"More than that," said Moon thoughtfully.

"I hope it's none of those expelled beachcombers."

"Let us at least hope it's not Macara's gang," said Moon.

Through a rift in the palms they could see the boat nose into the beach and the men jump ashore.

"There's about a score of them. Would you mind, Missis, if I went down and reconnoitered a little?"

"Don't be long, then. I'm rather anxious."

"Don't worry. It will be all right."

With a reassuring smile he hurried downhill, but when he came back his face was troubled.

"Well?"

"Beachcombers, all right."

"Not Macara?"

" 'Fraid so. I wish I hadn't let Jones go."

"Do you suppose they'll give trouble?"

"One never can tell. If they knew I was here, probably they would. Well, the Major will be back this evening, and you can leave with him."

"You won't come?"

"No. I must stay to protect the house."

"Have you weapons?"

"There's the rifle and shotgun. Then I have my Smith and Wesson. I wish I could get a message to Jones to hurry back."

"Perhaps we could find someone at the village to take it. Let's try."

The village was in the other direction from the bay where the beachcombers had landed. There they found a small boy who eagerly volunteered to take a message. Moon scribbled a hasty note.

"You go plenty quick, savvy. Bad feller him come. Plenty feller fight, I think. Mister Jones he come plenty quick."

Profoundly impressed, the boy launched a small pirogue and paddled swiftly down the lagoon.

"Poor kid! He's got four hours' hard humping before him."

They returned slowly to the house. Felicity lay down, and Moon spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning the weapons and laying the ammunition handy.

CHAPTER XII

MATI MAKES A STRIKE

THE professional beachcomber is the most degraded and bestial of creatures.

The beach of Papeete was like a sink in which were deposited the dregs and scourings of the Seven Seas. The élite of Papeete blackguardism was the gang of Bad Marc Macara.

It was said he would admit none but those who had been in prison or had killed his man. All qualified as far as the first condition was concerned; several admitted to the second.

Macara had an ambition. He wanted to be a king, the despotic ruler of some island remote and savage. One of the Solomons, for instance. He would subdue the local tribe, debauch the women, enslave the men. By terror and cruelty he would dominate them, so that in time he would reign like a real king, surrounded by a harem of black Marys and sustained by unlimited rum. His followers would share in his prosperity, and, once they were firmly established, would live on the fat of the land.

This he explained to the faithful four, urging them to secure as many recruits as possible. The result was that a dozen of the more desperate characters on the beach joined them. Half were runaway sailors, the other half ex-yeggmen. They seized a large whaling-boat with all the provisions they could lay hands on, and put off in the night. Even in the olden days of pirates and blackbirders, never did a greater boatload of ruffianism put to sea. And thus, outlaws and scoundrels all, they started on their desperate adventure.

A William Fox Production.

THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN REACHES THE SOUTH SEAS.

The Roughneck.

None of them had ever been in Moorea before; but they wanted water, so they decided to make it a short stopping-place. They were not afraid of the French Government pursuing them for the theft of the boat. The Government was only too glad to get rid of them. Besides, they were armed and could put up a nasty defense.

Swinging into the lagoon, they passed a village standing on a lawnlike promontory. Shaded by bread-fruit trees and glorious with crotons and flamboyants, it looked promising for an orgy. What was that fine house high in an undulating sweep of palms? It would be the home of some rich planter, no doubt. He, too, would be good for tribute. After they had bled the place white they would sail for another island. There was Bora Bora, Riatea, many more. All would be at their mercy. Macara's one regret was that they had not seized a schooner.

So they beached the boat, made a camp, and prepared for the triumphs that awaited them. Having eaten heavily and drunk of rum till they were staggering, most of them lay down to sleep in the palm-shade. Windy Bill and Smeet, however, were restless.

"That white house on the hill," remarked Windy. "It hit me bang in the eye. S'pose we mosey up there and do a little snoopin' round."

"Where ye goin'?" growled Macara.

"Aw! Jest to reconnoiter a bit. I smell chickens."

"All right. We need 'em for supper. Requisition all ye can. If they object, jest give 'em a note on General Macara."

Macara was fast yielding to the idea that he was a modern Morgan or at least a Bully Hayes. His men, with red handkerchiefs round their heads, belted and pistoled, looked the part of buccaneers. His ambition soared to rum-inspired heights.

Smeet and Windy struck out in the direction of the big white bungalow, but at the garden found their way blocked by a fence of barbed wire. Smeet was for wriggling through, but Windy objected.

"We're not a pair of bleeding bums. We're the red rovers of the sea. We don't beg; we accept. Think a white man's going to kow-tow to some blinking half-breed planter? We'll soon show him where he gets off at. Stick out yer chest, Cap'n Kidd. We'll swagger right up to this guy's front door, and if he don't come through like a toff, God help him!"

They began to pick their way to the front entrance, making a wide détour amid the palms, for the brush was thick around the garden.

"Who's that?" said Smeet suddenly. "That fat guy—wot's 'e up to?"

"Dunno. He don't see us. Let's get nearer and watch him, anyway."

It was Mati busy with his divining outfit. Mati was enjoying himself. It was thrilling, this hunt for buried treasure. One never knew the moment the needle might dip. Every tree was a fresh hope, and each one finished with narrowed down the search. He knew the stuff was there. He must find it. Not that the treasure itself mattered so much. Mati was not keen on money. But the seeking was rare sport. Yet . . . it did matter too. Mati loved pearls. Like most Polynesian half-breeds, they were a passion with him. He cared for them for their own sakes, not for their market value. He glowed with triumph at the thought of the moment he would unearth them. So with fresh ardor he pursued his quest.

"Say," said Smeet, "seems to me I've seen that bloke's mug before."

"S-sh! It's the greasy guy that runs the roast pig and *poi* joint in Papeete."

"And wot's 'e doin' over 'ere?"

"Ye got me guessin'. It's a rum go. Seems as if he's measurin' out the ground."

"Wot's that funny thing he's got in 'is 'and?"

"Search me."

The two watched curiously. Suddenly Windy, peering through the palms, gave a low whistle.

"I got it. . . . Smeet, did you ever hear of ol' Cap Barbazo?"

"A hard old nut, they say."

"Yeh. And they say, too, he'd a peck o' pearls, the pick of the Paumotos. But when he cashed in, the pearls seemed to vanish. No one ever heard of them any more. It's supposed he buried them on his place. Now I come to think of it, this must be about the location of his ranch."

"A funny yarn. D'ye think there's anything in it?"

"One never can tell. This guy's worth watching, anyhow."

"Gee Christmas! If he should find 'em, wot a bit o' luck for 'im!"

Windy nodded significantly. "And for us."

"By gosh, Bill, ye wags yer jaw a 'ole lot, but now ye're sayin' som'thin'. Would ye let the gang in?"

"Nothin' doin'."

"Macara would roast us over a slow fire if 'e knew we'd double crossed 'im."

"Take a chance."

"All right, Bill."

The two watched, but Mati continued his slow progress from palm to palm. They lay down in the shade and drowsed a bit. Out in the grilling patches where the sun poured through, Mati perspired and panted. However, he was entirely happy.

Smeet was dreaming of a golden houri girdled with lustrous pearls when Windy grabbed him by the arm.

"Look! As I'm a livin' sinner, darned if he ain't found sompin'."

It seemed as if Mati had struck it at last. With a short-handled spade he was digging frantically. Suddenly the spade jarred against a hard metallic object. Victory! Uttering a squeal of triumph Mati yanked it out of the soil—the steel box.

It was a little larger than an ordinary cash-box and covered with rust. Locked, yes; but the lock must be rotten by now. Mati pried at it with the edge of his spade. It gave. He wrenched it open.

The pearls! Ha! there they were wrapped in an old *pareu*. Mati fell on his knees, gazing at them with gloating eyes. Then suddenly he slammed the box close. For four other eyes were gazing and gloating. Startled, he looked up to see two raffish-looking strangers.

"Some dazzlers!" said Windy coolly. "Ye beat us to it, pal."

"What do you mean?" gasped Mati.

"Why, we was just comin' to collect them shiners. Now I guess we'll have to let you stand in."

He made a snatch at the box, but Mati hugged it closely.

"I don' understan'. They belong me."

"Like hell they do!" said Windy Bill. "Didn't me father, the old Cap, tip me off about them beans?"

"You father?"

"Yep. Me natural father. Him what ruined and left me pore mother. If ye don't believe me I refer you to this gen'leman here. Oh, me heartless father!"

"Yes, an' me uncle," said Smeet. "Me wicked uncle."

"So now, you see, we've more right to them pearls than

you have," said Windy, making another grab for them.

Mati began to run. For a fat man he made a quick start, but Smeet tripped him and fell on him. Then Mati yelled for aid.

"Don't waste no more words on the blighter," said Smeet. "Take the bloody spade and give 'im a clip on the nut."

Windy hesitated. He had a rather fastidious objection to crude violence.

"Garn!" snarled Smeet. " 'E'll 'ave the 'ouse down on us. Quick! Bash in 'is bean!"

Windy raised the spade when a very tall white man parted the bushes. Smeet sprang up, but seemed to run into a left-handed blow that promptly laid him flat. Windy was about to bring the spade down on the newcomer's head when he felt the poke of cold steel in his ribs. Two somber eyes were boring into his.

"Drop that over your back, dog!"

Windy tossed the spade behind him.

"Now get out, both of you. If ever I catch you snooping round this place again I'll pack you full of buckshot. Git, you swine!"

They went quickly enough; but Smeet stared back very hard, and when they were safely screened by intervening palms he turned to his mate.

"Say, Windy, it's puzzled me. Did yer rekkernize that cove?"

"No."

"That's the bloke wot beat up Macara."

Windy whistled. "Well, well. He's shaved off his beard, but now you mention it I believe you're right. Hully Gee! This looks interestin'. Come on, Smeet. We've got to make our reports to the General."

CHAPTER XIII

MACARA MAKES HIS PLANS

"AND some they was hefty as pigeon's eggs," said Smeet.

"And there wasn't one that wasn't bigger than a peanut," said Windy.

"And some was like moonshine melted into a pool," said Smeet.

"And some was like gobs of twilight," said Windy.

"An' they was all shiny an' velvety an' trembly in the light," chorused the two.

"But how much was they wuth?" said Macara. "That's the pint. Damn their looks. How much was they wuth?"

"'Bout a quarter of a million, maybe," said Smeet.

"Mor'n that, I guess. Maybe a half at present prices," said Windy.

"An' the big stiff went off wid 'em?"

"Yep. He and the fat guy. They're up in the house now."

"Well, we've got to get 'em, that's all there is to it. We gotta see no one leaves the house—surround it."

"At a safe distance," said Smeet. "The big feller said he'd put a prune in us if he lamped us."

"You're sure he was the same we had the trouble wid in Papeete?"

"Sure."

"Well, that's another reason. When I gets my two hooks on that lad the things I won't do to him won't be worth mentionin'. Now, the fust thing is to see they don't

escape. Bill, you and Smeet know the lay o' the land. Better take other four of the boys and spread round the house. If anyone tries to break away, plug 'em good. We'll attack the house after dark. There's a bit of a moon, ain't there?"

"A late one."

"All right. Dutch, you've been a military man, what's yer plan of action?"

Gunsburg expectorated thoughtfully.

"We must enter de garden under cover of de darkness. Six of us form a cordon round de house so's no one gets away. Den de odders attack in mass formation by de steps in front."

"Gee! that sounds like the right dope. If we can only lay our mitts on the fat guy what found the pearls we know how to make him cough up. As for the big stiff, he's my meat."

"All right, General."

"Now, get off, Bill. Don't lose any time. Keep in touch wid yer men. Let us know if anything happens or if ye need help. Hank, don't let any more rum be served out. We've got to keep sober for one night of our lives. The lower we lie the better. Come on, Dutchy, you'll go wid me. There's no use fightin' if we don't have to. We're goin' up now to interview the boss of that big house an' see if we can't arrange things friendly-like. We'll pack the banner of peace, and ask him to hand over them two fellers. If he won't—why, then it's war."

CHAPTER XIV

MACARA DECLARES WAR

1.

IN the sunny calm of the afternoon Felicity partly forgot her fears. Moon had not told her of his affair with the beachcombers, and as she gazed on the shimmering serenity of garden and grove it was difficult to believe that danger lurked there.

So she took heart, and began to prepare for her departure. With the help of Ah Chee, the cook, she was packing one of her steamer trunks when, like a blot, two men appeared on the shining lawn. With a startled cry she darted back into the house.

Except for their uniform ruffianism, Macara and Gunsburg made a marked contrast. Macara was towering, black-visaged, hulking. Gunsburg was squat, blonde, and grossly fat. Truculently they swaggered across the lawn and paused in front of the house. They were in no hurry, deliberately inspecting everything. After what seemed an age Felicity heard their heavy feet mounting to the veranda, then Macara's gruff tones.

"Must have cost a bunch of dough to rig things up like this. I wouldn't wonder if them folks is mighty well fixed. Look at them chairs, Dutchy; an' then cushans; an' that sofar. Solid comfort I calls it."

Macara threw himself on one of the wicker armchairs which creaked complainingly. Gunsburg followed his example.

"Say, if we just had a nice fat cigar an' a long rum-punch clickin' wiv ice, we'd be all set up. S'pose we order 'em."

Macara banged on the table. No reply.

"Seems to be nobody at home. Hi! Anybody there?"

Felicity, trembling in her room, said to Ah Chee:

"Where's Mister Moon?""

"Me no savvy. Me no see him since lunch."

"Well, better go and find out what they want."

Ah Chee went reluctantly.

"Hullo, Chink," growled Macara. "What the hell you keepin' us waitin' for? Where's the boss?"

"He go out."

"Aw . . . did he? You can fetch us a long, cool drink then."

As Ah Chee hesitated Macara half rose with a threatening snarl.

"Look slippy, ye darned heathen!"

Ah Chee sped to his kitchen.

"Yep," commented Macara, "they seem to do things elegant in this joint. Swell China-boy, books, grammyphone, everything high-toned. I could do wid a place like this meself, Dutchy. Well, wait till we gits our island."

"Ya, I tink dey make lots o' money 'ere," said Dutchy.

"So much the better. They won't miss a nice contribution to our expedition. Just the sort o' help we was lookin' for. Luck I call it. Hurry up, Chink. We're darned dry."

Ah Chee came with a tray on which stood two tall glasses of opaline liquid.

"That looks good to me," said Macara approvingly. "You ain't forgotten the ice. Say, Chink, I want you to fetch yer boss. Tell him two gen'lemen want to interview him most particular. And, say, get us two cigars first."

Ah Chee laid a box on the table.

"Whew! Havanas! Guess I'll take the box. Have one on me, Dutchy. Now, you Mongolian mongrel, get a move on and hustle up that boss of yours."

Ah Chee went back to Felicity.

"He say I catchee boss. He velly bad man. You no go, Missy."

But Felicity decided otherwise. It seemed the only way to get rid of them. Picking up her courage she faced them.

"Well, what do you want?"

They stared at the slim girl with the clear-cut features and the mass of tawny hair. A stealthy glance passed between them.

"We want the boss," said Macara insolently, cigar in mouth.

"I'm mistress here. What can I do for you?"

"You can fetch us the matches."

"Ah Chee, the matches."

The Chinaman brought them. She still stood in the doorway, her head held high. She watched Macara light his cigar, and he did so very deliberately. He seemed to be studying her.

"May I ask your business?" she asked again.

"Well, Ma'am, it's this," said Macara, spitting on the floor matting; "we're a party of explorers. We put in here because we're short of grub, and we thought you could help us out."

"What do you need?"

"Oh, most everything, 'specially likker. Ye see, we're off on a long trip, an' we had to leave in a hurry. There's nigh a score of us, an' we eats an' drinks pretty hearty."

"All right. I'll give you all I can."

Macara considered frowningly. "You haven't got a boat you could give us as well?"

"I have no boat."

"Well, we've got to get on fast or we'd be tickled to have

ye invite us to stop. Yer mighty well fixed up here. Sorry we can't give ye the pleasure of our sassiety, but suckanstances is pressin', so if ye'll kindly get that grub down to the beach right away, it'll save trouble. Don't forget the likker."

"I'll do my best."

"And, say . . . there's two fellers stoppin' here . . . we want them, too. One's a big guy about the same size as me; the other's summat the build o' Dutchy here. You know the lads I'm alludin' to."

"I think so."

"Well, we want them fellers badly. Ye'd better perdooce 'em right away."

"I don't know where they are."

"That don't go. We know they're on the place. If they won't come, get yer servants to fetch 'em. We've got to have them fellers."

"I can't do what you ask."

"You mean you won't. Say, Ma'am, the big stiff ain't your sweetheart, is he?"

She disdained a reply. Macara chuckled evilly, and his small eyes lit up as he regarded her.

"That lad knows a good thing when he sees it. Tasty bit o' skirt, ain't she, Dutchy. Here, lady, I drinks to ye."

He held the glass of opaline liquid to the light and cocked his eye at it approvingly.

"Yer health, Ma'am."

But even as he spoke the glass shattered in his hand, and the liquid splashed over him. Moon stood in the doorway, a revolver held at his hip.

"Go inside," he said quickly to Felicity. "I'll deal with them. Hands up, blast ye!"

Both men were groping for their guns, but up went their hands. They had too good an opinion of Moon's shooting to take a chance.

"Now back off the veranda."

They did so solemnly, keeping their eyes on him. He held his gun carelessly, but his gaze was steady. As they backed down the stairs, they looked rather ridiculous.

"Now right about turn," rasped Moon. "Beat it like hell, or I'll pull on you."

As they hesitated, a bullet whistled between them, so they wheeled round and bolted. But at the first cover Macara turned and roared back:

"All right. Look out now. I came for peace, but if ye want war, by cracky! ye'll have it, ye —— —— ——!"

A second bullet warned him that further vituperation was unhealthy.

So with a last curse he ran raging to the beach.

2.

General Macara was snoring in the shade of a palm when he was awakened by Lieutenant Gunsburg.

"What t'hell's wrong? 'Tain't time to attack. The moon ain't up."

"No, but dere's a cutter puttin' in. She's gonna tie up to the wharf."

"A cutter! What size?"

"About fifty feet long maybe. She got a small auxiliary engine."

"Hallelujah! That's the very thing we're lookin' for. Darn me skin, what luck! Say, the devil's lookin' after us this trip, me lads. We'll not only get them pearls, but we'll have a real boat wot'll carry us to Australy if we want. Look alive, there! We gotta board the cutter and get possession. Knock any slob on the head that shows fight. When that little job's over we'll tackle the one on the hill. Come on, now! Darn yer lousy hides! get a move on yez. Gee! What luck! What luck!"

CHAPTER XV

THE ATTACK

1.

DURING the afternoon the weather had changed, and, with the coming of evening, storm-clouds blotted out the stars. It was unusually dark, with a great wind blowing. It blew in furious gusts, tossing the palms, then suddenly ceased. The calm after these wind tantrums was peculiarly weird. It seemed of unnatural profundity. Altogether a queer sort of night.

Moon and Felicity sat in a sheltered corner of the veranda with the lamp between them. She had eaten very little at supper, and, as she waited, something in the tension of the sudden silences seemed to screw her nerves to snapping-point. It was a relief when the squall came on again and the bushes writhed and whitened under that roaring blast.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a bad time," said Moon.

"Bad in more senses than one," she sighed.

Then the wind, like a suddenly loosed stream, was on them again, and they could not hear each other speak. But again, like a stream suddenly dammed, it ceased, and the unearthly calm reigned once more.

Crash!

Sudden darkness. A pungent smell of kerosene.

She stifled a scream.

"What is it?" she gasped.

She heard Moon's deep, cool voice.

"Guess they've shot the lamp out. I might have known."

"You mean we shouldn't have shown a light," she whispered.

"Yes. They mustn't know where we are."

Once again the wind buffeted the palms. They drew back a little and sat in the dark. When the next calm spell came he asked:

"Where's Mati?"

"He's burying his precious pearls in the cellar. He's going to make a break for it."

"And the cook?"

"I should tell him the danger. Maybe he'd better clear out too."

Then she called softly: "Ah Chee."

Like a shadow the China-boy came to her side.

"I think heap trouble to-night, Ah Chee. Bad man come. Fight, maybe. You no stop. Better go village."

But Ah Chee shook his head.

"I no go. Too muchee flaid. I see man he watchee house allee time. S'pose I go he catchee me. I stop. I go hide. No can find. All light."

"All right, Ah Chee. Do as you like. Only take care of yourself."

"Don't worry about him," said Moon. "Trust a wily Celestial to look out for himself. He'll stow away in the kitchen boiler or something."

"Did you hear what he said about the house being surrounded?"

"Yes; I know it. I counted seven of them. Mati had better not make the attempt to get away. Here he comes."

The fat half-breed was shaking like a jelly. Even in the darkness they could see his face chalky with terror.

"You'd better not try it, Mati. They're all around us."

Mati peered into the darkness. For the moment not a leaf stirred. Such a silence reassured him.

"I think I go. I'm too much scare. No rest here. I get away sure. Then I tell that Jones hurry up quick."

Quietly he slipped down from the veranda and disappeared. The darkness just swallowed him up. Then another paroxysm of wind came on. It shrilled and shook the house; it lashed the palms till they tossed like waves of the sea; it filled the night with violence. But again it seemed to lift, and a silence flowed about them bodeful in its intensity.

"*Ah-a-a-a-a!*"

The scream was dreadful. It sheared the stillness like a saber, and in her terror Felicity clutched at Moon. He put his arm round her.

"They've got him, the devils! It's not safe to go out there."

"Do you think they've killed him?"

He did not answer. Tense, watchful, they waited; but from that mysterious dark there came no other sound. He could hear her breathing close to his ear, feel her trembling in the hollow of his arm, even catch the beating of her heart. A fierce joy surged in him.

"How long the time seems!" she whispered. "I wish the moon would come up. I'm terribly afraid. Not for myself. . . ."

"I know—the Major."

"Yes, he. . . . Listen! There's the sound of his boat now."

They heard the faint throb of a motor.

"Let me go to the edge of the veranda and see," said Moon.

"No, don't leave me. I'll come too."

They crept forward and peered down.

"Yes, it's Hillcrest. These are his lights. He's tying up at the wharf."

"Oh, if we could only warn him. He'll come up here and just tumble into their hands."

There came a sound of voices and then Hillcrest's clear "Good-night." He had hurried ashore, and, lantern in hand, he was coming to join them. They could see that tiny yellow spark threading through the palms. Now it had reached the coral road that swept to the house. Hillcrest was singing gayly and swinging his light. But about two-thirds up the hill he stopped.

Whatever was happening on the wharf? There were howls of fear and pain, the crash of blows, the red spit of a revolver, a splash, a second splash, silence again.

Evidently Hillcrest was puzzled, anxious. They saw his light begin to descend the hill. He was going back to see what was wrong. Then from the bush beside him came another revolver spit. His light went out.

"They've got him," wailed Felicity. "It was just as if someone leapt at him and he dashed the lantern in his face. Hark! That's his voice. He's struggling down there, fighting for life . . ."

And, indeed, they could hear sounds of a fierce struggle, shouts, curses; at last, a great cry of distress and pain.

"They're killing him!" she moaned. "Oh, can we do nothing? Must we stand by and hear them murder him?"

She grasped Moon's arm fiercely.

"Can't you go down and try to save him?"

"And leave you here alone?"

"Never mind me. I can't stand by and let him be killed. For God's sake go to his aid. Are you afraid?"

"For you, yes."

"I tell you, go. Go, or I'll hate you all my life."

Moon pressed his revolver into her hand.

"Take that, then; I'm going."

She clutched at him. "No, don't go. Come back . . ."

But he was gone. She saw him dart over the lawn. She was surprised that she could distinguish him; then quite suddenly she saw that the moon had cleared the palm fringe and was peering through a rift in the clouds. It was a faint and furtive moon. In its light the road of white coral gleamed spectrally. She tried to see what was going on, but all she could make out was a vague blur.

The distance was not great—about a hundred yards from the gate of the garden, and Moon covered it like a flash. He was on them before they realized what had happened. There were two of them. Hillcrest was lying on the road, and one of the men was kneeling on him. The other stood by, pistol in hand.

"Hit him with the butt of your gun," the standing man was saying. "Stove in his head and throw him into the bush."

Then, as the kneeling man raised his weapon, something white and swift came at them.

Such was the impetus of Moon's leap that the man who was standing crashed with him to the ground. But the force of that rush seemed to carry him on to the second man. He had the fellow, a little wharf-rat, by the throat; he raised him up powerfully, and dashed him down. Then, hoisting Hillcrest in his arms, he was off up the hill.

It all happened in a moment. The man with the pistol raised himself and fired after the vanishing figure, but in the uncertain light he must have missed. The other got up stupidly. Then a third and a fourth man came running. The last was Smeet. He addressed the man with the pistol.

"Did ye get 'im, Bill?"

"No, the big feller jumped us an' got away with him."

"The hell you say! Wot was you thinkin' of?"

"Dunno. Seemed to take us by surprise, to fall out of the bloody skies. Well, Macara's got the boat down there. He'll be up in a jiffy, and then we'll soon fix that son of a gun."

"No, come on. We won't wait for Macara. After him now."

2.

Even with the superhuman strength which seemed to come to him, by the time Moon reached the gate he was nearly exhausted. He paused a moment, then he heard the sounds of pursuit. They were hard on his heels. Bracing himself for the effort, he staggered across the lawn, stumbled up the steps, and fell forward on the veranda. Felicity ran to him.

"Quick!" gasped Moon. "Drag him in. Give me the revolver."

Lying flat on the flooring he twisted round. Four men had emerged from the darkness and were charging up the steps. Moon fired twice. One of the men dropped and lay still, a second with a yell of pain staggered back. The other two cowered, turned, and ran.

Sprawling on the flooring Moon glared tensely over his revolver sight. The three had retreated, but, doubtless, they were in the bushes waiting. He dared not raise himself. After watching a moment, still keeping his eyes on the steps, he worked back to the door of the house.

"How's the Major?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Unconscious. His head's sopping blood. What had I better do?"

"Do you think you can get him into the bathroom?"

"I'll try."

"You can light a lamp in there. They can't see it.

Then you can bathe his head. Try to give him some brandy. I've got to watch."

He heard her dragging Hillcrest into the deeper darkness. Then the striking of a match. The bathroom was lined with zinc, so that the light could not shine through its walls. Still watching the shadows, he recharged his revolver. There was no sign of further attack. Probably they had drawn off for reënforcements, or were preparing for a fresh rush. He crawled to an angle of the house so that he could command two sides of it. He was lying down, listening, watchful, when Felicity joined him.

"Keep low," he whispered. "They're out there, and if they see a shadow they'll fire. You shouldn't have come."

"I was anxious about you."

"But the Major?"

"He's come round. He's awfully weak and dazed, though. He wants to come out and help you, but he really isn't fit."

"No, he mustn't. He'll only make things worse. You'd better go back and stay with him. Don't worry. . . ."

She crawled away, but from the shadows of the doorway she whispered:

"Look out. They seem to be coming up from the boat. They're going to attack again."

"All right. Get inside. Leave it to me."

It was as he thought. The whole band were on them. For a moment his heart sank, then something happened to give him courage. Suddenly the clouds seemed to part, and the moon shone clear. The veranda was high, so that when he lay down they could not see him, while peering over its edge he could watch the garden below. The moon was his friend. The squall, too, had passed, and the smallest sound came to him.

Tense, alert, he waited for what seemed an age; then once again he heard Felicity at his side.

"He's feeling a little better now. I can't keep him back. He says he must help you."

"Well . . . I'm afraid they'll attack from all sides. Give him the rifle and ask him to guard the back."

"Yes, yes. And me—can't I do something?"

"Take the shotgun. Go to the other side and watch there. If anyone climbs to the veranda, fire."

"All right."

She crept back, and he breathed more freely. If those two could do something to protect two sides of the house he would answer for the rest. Again he waited.

Suddenly there was a fusillade from the bushes. It came from all around, and the bullets buried themselves in the boarding. Then under cover of it on the side nearest him two men rushed out and gained the cover of the house. Like a flash he saw the scheme of attack. A man singly could not climp up on the veranda, but one man could leap on the back of another and so gain it. Doubtless, under that covering volley they were scaling the veranda on three sides. He held his own fire and waited, praying that Felicity and Hillcrest might not be taken unawares.

Then the fusillade ceased, and all at once he saw some shadows run through the bushes and concentrate in front of the house. At the same time he heard the shotgun go off, followed by the rifle. Good! he thought, with a thrill. The other two were at their posts.

Abruptly over the edge of the veranda nearest him a face appeared, a man sprang up. Moon let him get well in view before he fired. The fellow spun round and disappeared with a thud. There! he had disposed of that danger, but he had barely time to turn about when the frontal attack was on. It was a rush and scramble.

There must have been half a dozen of them, and on they came, recklessly, leaping up the steps.

The man Moon had first shot still lay there, and the two foremost attackers tripped over him. This checked for a moment their wild charge and threw them into confusion. Moon began to discharge his gun. He fired four shots into their midst to the accompaniment of other shots, shouts, curses. Then suddenly the whole mob wheeled and scurried to the bushes.

He peered down to see what damage he had done. He could now see three bodies cluttering the stairway. Good. For a time, no doubt, they had been beaten off. He recharged his revolver.

He wondered how the other two had fared, and judging it safe for the moment, he crept back. He found them at their posts. They had each fired, but with uncertain results.

Hillcrest had a wild, strained look in his eyes. His face was very pale. He had evidently lost much blood, and his head was swathed round with a bandage. He gripped Moon's hand.

"How can I thank you, old man? You saved my life."

"That's all right. You'd have done the same for me."

But further expression of Hillcrest's gratitude was cut short by a stifled cry from Felicity. Her quick ear had heard the creak of a board on the veranda.

"There's someone there!" she whispered hoarsely.

Moon crept out. As he turned the angle of the house he saw a quick shadow flatten itself against the wall. Then a bullet whizzed past his head, and he, too, threw himself against the boarding. The moonlight falling on that side of the house showed the two men hugging the wall. Moon shifted his gun to his left hand and began to shoot. It was a curious duel. Moon had fired two shots when his

mysterious opponent slid round the angle of the house and vanished. He returned to the others.

"I think that was the one they call Hank," he laughed quietly. "He hugged the wall like a plaster. But I guess I hit him. Gee! I'm having the time of my life! I'm just getting warmed up."

Felicity was staring at him.

"Why, you're wounded. Your shoulder. . . . Look!"

In the excitement he had not noticed it. Blood was seeping out of his shirt.

"Bah! it's nothing. A scratch."

He stripped off the shirt, and Felicity looked at his wound.

She wrung her hands.

"It seems to be deep. I've two injured men now!"

She fetched some water and linen. As well as she was able she washed the wound and bound it about with strips of linen. Moon stood the while, revolver in hand, alert, listening, within his eyes the glad glow of battle. Hillcrest watched him anxiously. The Major's face was haggard, and he sagged wearily.

"This can't go on," said Felicity, looking from one to the other. "They're going to attack again in a few minutes. We can never defend this place. What's going to become of us?"

Then an idea came to her.

"Why didn't we think of it before? The studio!"

Moon cursed softly. He should have thought of that himself. If they could only get into the tower-shaped studio it would be easily defended.

"Maybe we can make a dash for it. Have you the key?"

"Yes, here it is," answered Felicity.

"Then we'll try it. But wait. . . . They must think we're still here. When you hear me firing in front you

two crawl out by the back door. The garden's in shadow there. Keep close to the ground and make no noise."

He went to the front room and lit a lamp. For a few moments he exposed himself boldly at the window. There was the ping-ping of lead about him. Three times he fired into the bushes, then cowering down he ran back to the rear of the house. There he dropped to the ground and crawled under cover of the verdure to the studio. The others were awaiting him.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Lock the door. The devils! They've rushed the house again."

CHAPTER XVI

THE WATCH FROM THE TOWER

1.

A NARROW stair went from the basement of the studio to the library. A trap-door shut them off from below. Between them they helped Hillcrest to ascend; but once there they felt comparatively safe.

The library was some fifteen feet from the ground, and above it was the studio. If by any possibility the library were attacked and taken, they could retreat still higher to the studio. Even now Jones must be on his way to their rescue.

Yet what of their injuries? Moon was hurt worse than he owned. He swore it was nothing, that he could use his arm freely; but there were moments when, watching him covertly, Felicity could see his lips compressed and his eyes dark with pain. Hillcrest had received an ugly smash on the temple. He lay down on a couch.

"How do you feel?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, pretty good. Picking up gradually. Head feels as big as a house and buzzing round like a top. I'll be all right in a day or two."

"You must get back to Papeete in the morning and go to the hospital."

"Righto! But remember we have to catch the *Raratonga.*"

She sighed. Somehow she couldn't see herself sailing on the *Raratonga.*

She had a spirit-lamp in the studio, and fruit and water in the basement; so she made tea for them, and they all ate a little. Outside, the moon had struggled clear of the cloud rack and shone sweetly. Through the palm tufts from the studio she could see the house plainly. It was in possession of the beachcombers. Lights were going from room to room. There were fierce cries and high curses.

She rejoined the other two.

"They're looking for us everywhere, turning the house upside down. They're frantic with rage we've escaped."

Moon roused as if from a stupor.

"I'll go up and see."

"No, you mustn't. You must stay here both of you and rest quietly. I'll go up again."

Once more she watched. In their mad rage the beachcombers were destroying everything. Then she heard shouts of joy.

"Maybe they've found the pearls."

But it was a case of champagne. Each man seized a bottle and knocked the head off. He did not stop until the entire contents gurgled down his throat. Then, with yells of laughter, he secured a second. Now they were searching the house, throwing the contents of drawers and trunks on the floor, gutting the cupboards. Loot was what they were after. They had her jewelry, her silver. One of them came out screaming with laughter. He had on her nicest evening dress and was dancing a hula-hula on the veranda. A mate hugged him tipsily, and they both toppled over.

They all seemed to be drunk now, reeling, roaring drunk. Three of them were fighting over some trinket; two more were waltzing to a tune on the phonograph. The man with the gown, and the one who had embraced him, were sprawling where they had fallen. So much for the recruits, the

riff-raff; but where were the heads of the gang, the Big Five? After richer game, no doubt; looking for the pearls. On the steps of the veranda were the three Moon had shot. It was all ghostly and bizarre—the greenish moonlight, the dark forms, some dead, some drunk; the wrangling and cursing; slaughter and laughter. It was horrible but strangely fascinating.

Then from the dark basement she heard a shriek, and she remembered Ah Chee. They had found him. Ah! they were torturing him! He was squealing like a rabbit in the clutches of a weasel. With a shudder she put her hands to her ears, trying to shut out those cries of agony.

What were they doing now? They had dragged the China-boy up from the basement. Macara was there, and Smeet, and the Dutchman. As they pushed Ah Chee forward, she saw that he had a rope round his neck. Gunsburg dragged him by the rope to the edge of the balcony. He threw one end over a hammock-hook under the eaves of the roof, pulling on it till Ah Chee was forced to mount on the rail of the veranda. Then she heard the roar of Macara.

"Tell us where they are, ye blasted Chink, or over ye go!"

"No see. No savvy," whimpered Ah Chee.

"Then where's the bunch? Where's the big guy? Where's the fambly?"

"No savvy."

"Aw, ye lie, ye lousy heathen! Go on wid ye."

With that Macara handed him a punch that knocked him over the balcony. Gunsburg was going to let loose the rope, but Macara grabbed it. With a jerk the China-boy stopped, and his neck snapped. There he dangled in the moonlight. Indifferently Gunsburg made fast the rope.

"Chinamen and niggers don't count," said Macara. "They ain't real men. There's no more harm in killin' them than there is in killin' monkeys. Come on, boys, we'll have another look."

Just as when a man gets drunk there is a point where he becomes insensible to pain, so in scenes of violence there is a stage where horror ceases to horrify. Felicity felt she was fast reaching the numbing-point of emotion. Anything seemed natural now. Again she crawled down to where the two men were awaiting her. Hillcrest was lying with closed eyes. Moon sat beside him, breathing heavily.

"They've hanged Ah Chee," she told them, with a strange calm. "They'll be coming after us next."

"Jones should be on his way," said Moon. "What's the time?"

She consulted the luminous dial of her wrist-watch.

"It's after midnight."

"He would receive my message about nine. Yes, if nothing happens he should be here in two more hours."

"In three hours it will be dawn. You heard them rioting. Oh, my poor house! They're nearly all drunk."

"Ay, the hell-hounds! I'd like to take a pot at some of 'em."

"No, you mustn't. They'd find we were here."

"Oh, they'll find us soon enough. I wish Jones would come."

2.

Jones was well on his way.

The native boy was delayed by head winds, and it was ten o'clock when he reached Maharapa. The *himine* had already begun. The boy found Jones and delivered the note; then Jones sought out the Raratongan Captain.

"We've got to get back at once. There's danger to the

Missis. A bunch of beachcombers have landed from Papeete. Macara . . . ."

At that name the Raratongan jumped. He knew it was serious, and that they had no time to lose. But—here he scratched his grizzled stubble ruefully—during the last few miles the *Island Queen* had developed motor trouble. He didn't know what was wrong. It might take hours to fix.

"Hell!" said Jones. Then he cornered Arootoo. Him he tried to convince, but the Chief was incredulous. It was only after the offer of a case of rum Arootoo seemed to be impressed with the seriousness of the situation. He thought, however, it would be difficult to get enough boys away from the *himine* to man the big war canoe, but he would do his best. Accordingly he gathered them together and harangued them lustily. Finally he said:

"They say one bottle rum one man they go."

"All right," said Jones. "Tell 'em I'll give 'em each a *pareu* and two tins of salmon as well. Only tell 'em, for the love of Mike, to look lively."

All this caused delay, and it was nearly eleven when the big war canoe took the water. However, she was manned by a score of stalwart natives, so that she simply swished along. The Chief had a steering paddle, and at his feet sat Jones with a sack between his knees.

After they had been on the way about an hour their speed slackened. Then Jones dipped into the sack, handing out four bottles of rum. Having drunk deeply, the paddlers once more made the water fly. Overhead the moon was shining, and it was a pretty sight to see the great canoe shoot forward like an arrow in the silver of the lagoon.

Once more their gait lagged, and again the rum had a magic effect.

The third time this happened Jones became impatient. A curious excitement was growing in him. He served out a double dose for each and shouted to them to paddle for all they were worth. Perhaps his excitement communicated itself to them, or perhaps it was the rum, but they responded nobly. Ten to a side the paddles dipped like one, and seemed to bend under their powerful strokes. The prow sheared the glaze of the lagoon; the shoreward palms peered down in silver surprise, and the reef roared its eternal derision.

They were getting close now. Suddenly Jones started. He heard the sound of shots. On the hillside was a red glow that brightened to yellow.

"Buck up, boys, for God's sake. They're fighting up there. Oh, the sons of Satan! They're burning down the house."

The great canoe shot forward. It was almost as if it wanted to leave the water, take to the air. The men needed no urging now. They saw the red glare on the hill, and they, too, were tense with excitement. They were Mooreans, noted for their bravery. The thought of a fight maddened them. Besides, each man had half a bottle of rum in his belly. So with teeth clenched and eyes gleaming they bent their muscular backs to the stroke.

"Faster, faster!" yelled Jones.

"Faster, faster!" roared the Chief.

Then the men, panting, dripping, working as if their own lives were at stake, sent the long black canoe shattering through the silver mirror of the lagoon. The old Chief steered it into the shingle by the wharf, and in another moment it crashed and shot half out of the water on to the beach.

CHAPTER XVII

THE REVELATION

1.

FROM the studio on the tower-top Felicity could see far up the lagoon. Anxiously she scanned that silver reach of water for a sign of Jones.

On the moonlit veranda the beachcombers now sprawled in drunken sleep, but there was no sign of Macara and his four lieutenants. She peered out nervously, half afraid they might spy her. And always she avoided looking at the dangling shape of Ah Chee.

When she returned from a longer watch than usual she noticed a change in the two men. Hillcrest was obviously picking up, but Moon had become strangely lethargic.

"How are you?" she asked anxiously.

"I'm all right."

He roused himself. Someone was shouting to them from the moonlit mat of verdure below.

"Hullo! Anybody up there?"

It was Macara's voice. Moon started up, his revolver in hand.

"Let me shoot the brute."

"No, no. Let's keep silence. They may think there's no one here."

However, Macara's suspicions were roused.

"I believe you're up there," he bawled. "Come down and tell us where ye've put them pearls an' we won't hurt you."

No answer.

"Here, you fellers, try that door."

"It's locked," came from Gunsburg.

"Bust it in."

They hurled themselves against the door and the fastening gave. The three in the library listened.

"There's a stair, Bill."

"Yes, but it leads through a trap-door that's shut."

"Try to force it."

"Can't budge it. Guess they're there, all right. Tell the General."

Informed of their suspicions, Macara tried again.

"Hi! you folks. Come out o' that an' we'll let ye off. I gives ye my affydavit. If ye don't we'll soon fix ye."

Moon was no longer to be restrained. He fired in the direction of the voice. There was a roar of rage and pain.

"You got the blighter somewhere," said Hillcrest cheerfully. "Let me have a pot at one of them. I used to be pretty good with a revolver."

But Moon replied with a curse. "Empty," he said, throwing down the gun. "I've no more ammunition."

"Too bad."

"Yes. . . . Why don't Jones come?"

He watched Felicity mount to the studio for the fifth time. In his eyes was a strange, desperate look. Suddenly he seemed to make up his mind about something. With evident difficulty he climbed the spiral stair and joined her.

2.

The moon flooded the studio with a vitriolic light, and in its greenish glamor they both looked weird and ghostly. Moon was bare to the waist, with the blood showing black

through his shoulder bandage. Felicity's face was blanched, and her eyes had a hectic brightness. She turned and gazed at him with some surprise.

"You shouldn't have come up here," she chided. Then she added anxiously: "I'm sure you're keeping something back from me, Jack Moon. You're worse hurt than you pretend."

"No, that's all right. It was something else I wanted to tell you—something else I've been keeping back from you."

He stared into the night. The palm fronds looked nickel-plated in the moon. Through them he could see the house he had built flooded with a strange light, its veranda huddled with black forms, the living lying with the dead. Like a slim ghost swung the white shape of Ah Chee. Then his eyes went to the shining reach of the lagoon, placid, dreaming.

"I wanted to tell you something. I may never get a chance again."

She was alarmed at his tone, the break in his voice.

"Go on," she almost whispered.

"I've often wanted to tell you, but . . . well, you remember a Calvary in Brittany and a blind woman and a man who wept?"

A long silence. She seemed to be pondering. Her eyes never left his face.

" . . . I remember."

"I was the man."

"You! Her son!"

"Yes. I couldn't explain why I disappeared. It was . . . difficult."

"I might have known," she cried. "Now it all comes back to me. I see the resemblance that puzzled me so often. Ah! you should have told me."

"Well, I have at last. That's why I've always been so grateful."

"Is it. . . . There! Rest now. I want to think it over."

"You helped my mother," he went on brokenly.

"I was fond of her."

"My poor mother! She had a stormy life."

"She died in peace."

"Thanks to you."

"Oh, please don't think of all that. I . . . there's something I want to ask you. What's your real name? You told me once, but somehow I wasn't sure. Delane, wasn't it?"

"Jerome Delane."

"Then . . . you're not by any chance the son of one Desmond Delane?"

"That was my father's name."

"At one time associated in business with Stillwell Austin?"

Moon started. "Yes," he answered faintly.

"Then, don't you know Austin left you a lot of money? A million. The lawyers hunted for you everywhere, are still hunting, in fact. For if you were not found in ten years it was to go to charity."

"A million!"

"A round million. You're a rich man, Jack Moon. He seemed to think he'd done your father a wrong, and he wanted to make it up to the son. He was very wealthy. He bequeathed the rest of his fortune to charity. He had an only daughter, but they quarreled, and she left him. He cut her off with a dollar."

Moon seemed dazed. He stammered: "How do you know all this?"

Then she laughed a little wildly.

"Why, my dear man, it's family history. Stillwell Austin was my father."

3.

A profound, uncanny silence. . . .

Moon was looking at her in the strangest way. His eyes were round with horror. His breath came hard. He clutched at his throat as if he were choking. She was amazed at the change in him.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "Why do you stare at me like that? Can't you speak?"

At last his voice came faint and weak.

"Your father!"

"Yes, I've told you. Don't glare at me as if I were accurst. I know he wasn't an angel. I know he wronged you, but he did his best to make it right. I won't have anything said against him. After all, he was my father, and—he's dead."

Moon was still staring. He looked like a man in a dream. His lips twitched and trembled. In a shuddering tone he repeated:

"Your father!"

This time she spoke sharply. "Can't you understand? Yes, my father. I didn't choose him. I wasn't responsible for all he did. We weren't on speaking terms, in fact. Still, I won't have anything said against him."

But Moon did not seem to hear. He was looking past her as if he had a vision. His eyes were wild and wide. His jaw had fallen. Weakly he leaned against the wall. Then, with a shudder, he put his hands before his face as if to shut out something.

She was alarmed now. She went close to him, laying her hands on his wrists.

"What's the matter? Tell me please. It's your wound. You're sick."

"Ay," he moaned, "sick, sick!"

His great frame seemed to sag. She was afraid he was about to faint.

"Go and lie down," she begged. "You'll feel better in a little."

Gently she pulled his hands away from his face.

"Oh, please don't look in that dreadful way! Go on now, there's a good man. I know you're feeling bad. Believe me, I understand." . . . She aided him. He groped like a blind man, but she saw him reach the library. With drawn lips and eyes despairing she returned to her watch at the window.

"What an awful night!" she sobbed. "The end of everything, I think. No sign of Jones yet. . . . Whatever are they doing down below? They seem to have dragged all the veranda-screens off and piled them round the base of the tower. Up to some devilish trick. I wonder. . . ."

But she had no time to put into words the fear that came to her. A shout of alarm rang out. It was Hillcrest's voice. Swiftly she descended the stairs, and there paused in amazement at what she saw.

4.

Hillcrest and Moon were locked in a desperate struggle. They sprawled grotesquely on the floor. Moon was trying to lift the trap-door, and Hillcrest fighting to prevent him. Hillcrest cried to her pantingly: "Don't let him! He

wants to go down, give himself up. He thinks it will save us. He's mad. . . ."

He strained furiously to pull Moon's hands away from the bolt of the trap. Felicity knelt down and lifted them gently, holding them in her own.

"You mustn't do that, Jack Moon," she told him. "It wouldn't do a bit of good. If you go I'll go too. I swear it! You must stay here. We need you to protect us. You wouldn't desert us?"

"I thought they'd be satisfied with me," he muttered.

"No they wouldn't. Promise me you'll stay with us. You won't do it?"

His face was sullen.

"Promise," she insisted.

"All right, I'll stay," he said reluctantly.

"Thank you, my friend. . . . Ah! What's that?"

A smell, pungent, penetrating, came through the open window.

"They've fired the veranda-screens," she cried. "The fiends mean to burn us alive."

"Smoke us out," said Hillcrest. "They reckon we won't wait to be burned alive."

Moon was leaning from the window. From the screens of palm-leaves a dense cloud was rising. They were slightly damp, and as yet there was no flame. A wreath of smoke curled in, making him draw back with a choking gasp. He gave Hillcrest a look of utter despair. Then both men started, for a cry rang out. It came from Felicity, who had again mounted to the studio.

"I see them! They're coming! The big canoe full of men."

Indeed it was a splendid sight. The huge canoe sheared through the shimmering lagoon. From its prow upswerved a surge of silver. Each paddle was like a blade of light.

A score of swarthy bodies swayed and swung in furious unison.

"Oh, hurry!" she cried. "Hurry!"—as if they could hear her over all that distance.

Down below a red flame darted. It vanished, smothered by the thickening column of smoke. Then again it shot up stronger than before. As the two men, sick with anxiety, watched it, once more they heard the girl's excited cry:

"They've landed. Hurrah! They're running through the grove, up the hill. Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

She could see the brown figures swarming up the beach, rushing with fierce yells over the flat. That must be Jones in the lead. For a few seconds only they paused by the tool-shed, each man snatching a weapon. Some had axes, some crowbars, some only shovels. Yelling a barbaric war cry, they were leaping up the hill.

The red flame licked the walls of the tower now. There was something feline about it—like a fierce animal savoring a morsel it meant to devour. The smoke was stifling, the heat intolerable. Felicity half tumbled down the studio stairs, her eyes wild with excitement.

"They'll be here in a few minutes more," she almost screamed.

Then she gasped as the smoke got her.

"A few minutes will be too late," gritted Moon. "A few seconds, even. We'll have to jump. The tower's afire."

Snatching a blanket from the couch, he threw it round her, covering even her face.

"Jump!" he shouted to Hillcrest.

Then, before she could realize what he was doing, he took her in his arms, mounted on the window-sill, and leapt far out over the hungry flames.

5.

Jones was in the garden now, running towards the roaring tower. Three fleeing shadows he saw, and he fired, hitting one. On the second of the fugitives leaped Arootoo, splitting the man's skull with an ax. The third, backed against the barbed wire, showed fight, but a crowbar crumpled in his chest. So passed Hank, Gunsburg, and Windy Bill.

Jones rushed on to the tower, fearful that he would be too late. He found Felicity in Moon's arms. He dragged them back just as the flames began to lick at them. Felicity had fainted. Moon lay very still. Then Jones, looking up at the tower, saw Hillcrest staring down in horror.

"Jump, Major!" he yelled. "Jump to the right in that pile of brush."

Hillcrest made a wild leap, landing in some bushes. He staggered over to Felicity even as she opened her eyes.

"All safe, thank God!" he gasped.

But Jones, bending over the unconscious Moon, was shaking his head.

CHAPTER XVIII

MOON'S LAST FIGHT

1.

WITH the fullness of dawn things were restored to something like order.

The tower was burnt to the ground, the drunken beachcombers locked away. Smeet had given himself up, with a vague idea that he might be accepted as evidence against the others. Only Macara remained unaccounted for. Smeet told them that Macara, badly wounded by Moon's last shot, had taken to the bush.

Mati's body was found not far from the house, and, with that of Ah Chee, was laid with the other dead. Altogether there were eight of them. In the early morning the Rarotongan arrived with the *Island Queen*, and Mowera soon straightened up the house again. In a few hours all seemed as it had been before.

About noon Felicity said to Hillcrest: "You'd better go to Papeete at once. Get the best doctor. Promise him any money, but he must come right away."

"Is Moon bad?"

"Very bad, I think."

"How are you feeling yourself now?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter about me. I'll *live*."

"You mean? . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Charter the fastest boat you can find. Bring a nurse with you. If it's not too rough you should get back in twenty-four hours."

Hillcrest hurried away, and Felicity returned to Moon. He was sleeping. His face was drawn with suffering and he breathed stertorously. He had broken his leg in the jump from the tower, but it was the wound in his shoulder that worried her. The ball must have glanced downwards, penetrating his lungs. She did the best she could for him, but that wasn't much. Ah! the night would be long.

Going to the veranda she watched the Major's boat, with sails hard, making for Papeete. Somehow, suddenly she felt sad and old. She would never be the same again, she thought. When this was over, she would go away, maybe never come back,—that is, unless Moon got better. Then she realized that Moon meant more to her than Hillcrest. Quite wonderfully it came to her that she loved Moon.

Sitting by his side she watched his face. It was the face of a fighter. No pain could destroy its lines of grim resolution. Lying there on the white pillow it seemed to have the hardness of bronze. His mouth retained its stern cutting, with the scornful turn of the lips. His eyes were closed, so that she could not see the stormy look she loved. But she marked the hard jaw, the strong chin. Gently she touched the dark hair that curled so stubbornly. Bending over, she kissed him very softly.

2.

Early in the afternoon he opened his eyes.

"It's all right now," she told him. "Don't move. They've gone for the doctor."

"I'm so glad you're safe, Missis."

"Never mind about me. You've got to get better yourself. I'm going to nurse you till you do."

"But the boat. You'll miss it."

"Oh, I'm not going away now. At least, I'll wait till you're better."

He looked at her wonderingly.

"I'm sorry to give you so much trouble," he faltered.

"Rubbish!"

"No, it's too good of you. I don't deserve that."

"Hush! You mustn't think that. Rest now."

She laid her hand softly on his brow. He reached up and pressed it to his lips, but the effort seemed to give him pain.

"Now, please lie still."

"I will . . . thank you." He closed his eyes wearily again.

3.

How she wished Hillcrest would come! Moon was sinking visibly. Ever so often she went in and gazed at him, then looked anxiously over the sea. It was a sad time, one of those times that leave a scar for life.

The sun went down, but its sinking splendor seemed hateful. The moon climbed bravely, but its silver beauty mocked her. The pain at her heart was poignant.

"If he could only get better again," she thought. "How sweet the old life would be! How we would enjoy everything!" With a sigh she rejoined him.

About midnight he stirred uneasily. His cheeks had sunk deeply; his gaze was bright and wild. He was changing before her eyes.

"I want to tell you something," he whispered.

"No, no. Don't excite yourself."

"I must tell you because . . . I think I'm dying. I want to confess before I die. I once . . . killed a man."

"Killed!" Despite herself she shrank.

"Yes, killed," he repeated doggedly. "It wouldn't have mattered but for that. That was why I went away. You know . . . I've always loved you, Missis. I can tell you that now because I'm dying. From the first moment I saw you I believe I loved you. I would have told you but for . . . that. You understand?"

"Yes, yes. But there must have been a reason you killed. It was a fair fight. Or in self-defense."

"In self-defense. And even then I didn't mean it. He came at me out of the dark and I struck. I didn't know my own strength. When I looked he was dead."

"It was done in the madness of fear and despair," she assured him.

"Ay. He was a bad man. He robbed my mother. I had to get the money for her, so I entered the house at night. He came at me in the black darkness and I struck. Oh, I didn't mean to kill. I was horror-stricken. Then I escaped . . ."

"Is that all?"

"No," he went on with a brave effort. "I want to tell . . . all. I want to get your forgiveness before I die. The man I killed was . . . was Stillwell Austin."

A scream burst from her: "My father!"

He nodded. She was staring at him rather wildly. Strange! Her expression was not the horror he expected. It was a look of utter amazement.

"But," she cried, "another man admitted the crime—a well-known crook who had already threatened him. This man struck him with a bronze Buddha that stood on the mantelpiece. He said in his confession that a second man had entered as he was getting away, and he had hurled the body at him. . . . And all these years you've tortured

yourself with the thought that you had killed . . . Why, you're *innocent*. . . ."

Then, with a scream, she caught him. He had fallen back, and a dark stream was running over the pillow.

4.

When he again regained consciousness his first words were:

"Are you sure? If I only knew it was true, how happy I'd be!"

"Yes, yes. It's been proved. You can hold up your head with any man. You can live now."

"Oh, the thought's been hell to me! And when I found who you were up there in the tower I wanted to die. But now—I might live."

"Of course you will. You've all kinds of good work to do."

"Ay, but . . . I don't want that million. I wouldn't touch a cent of it. I'll give it all to the poor—sick mothers and children. I've always wanted to help them. I've suffered so much myself I know what it means. I've been an under-dog all my life, smirched and blackened, a roughneck. If I could only do a little to help I'd die happy."

"But you're not going to die."

"I don't know. If I do you'll see they get it—the helpless women, the innocent children, out there in that world of strife and pain."

"Oh, you'll live. You'll dispense the money yourself."

"No, if I live I'll never leave here. I could be so happy here, just working and trying to make folks happy round me."

"Don't worry, Jack Moon. You're going to live here in the sunshine and create beauty about you and grow in

heart and brain. If you don't want money, if you don't want the world, here you have all you need—health, peace, and the comfort of living helpfully."

His eyes were unnaturally bright.

"That's it," he nodded; "one should live bravely, so that one can die bravely. It don't matter about money. It don't matter about fame. These won't comfort a man when he's dying. It's only the kindness he's done, the ones he's helped."

Strength flickered in him. He groped for expression.

"There's something mighty sad about life," he went on. "We're lugged into it without being asked. We're like conscripts. There are victories and defeats, hardships and triumphs. In the end we die like soldiers and pass into the darkness from which we came. Out of the dark and into the dark, and none of us know what it means. It's not fair to us. Who would want a second innings?"

His mind seemed to be rambling. "Why do you talk like this?" she asked wonderingly.

"Because . . . because I feel I'm going . . . back into the dark."

His eyes in the pallor of his face were very sorrowful.

"One thing . . . I've always been a fighter. But I'd have liked to die fighting. A last great fight."

"Please don't talk like that," she begged. Then she thought: "Oh, how I wish they would come! I believe they'll be too late."

His gaze rested on her wistfully. His hand went out to her.

"You know I love you," he said faintly.

"Yes, and I love you. You must live for my sake. I, too, could give up the world, rest here always."

"It's too late," he whispered. "But I want you to know how happy I am, how . . ."

As she watched his face she saw his eyes dilate.

"Look!"

Slowly she turned in the direction of his stare. There in the doorway lay Macara. He had dragged himself across the veranda. His shirt was gummed to his body by clotted blood. As he hoisted himself slowly, blocking the doorway, his lips drew back over his discolored teeth exactly like the snarl of a mad dog. He was weak, and his hand trembled, but a bestial joy gleamed in his eyes.

"Thought ye'd done with me!" he sneered. "Well, I've been lyin' low, an' now I've got ye both."

Moon, still with that fixed stare, had raised himself to a sitting position. His left leg was broken, but he drew his right under him. Macara came close, always with that brutish snarl. He addressed Moon.

"Ye shot me. Ye got me all right. But I'm not through yet. This here's my revenge. Say yer prayers, the pair of yez, for as sure as hell's hot I'm goin' to kill ye both."

He held his heavy revolver menacingly before them. He pointed it at Moon, then he said: "No, by God! I know how to punish ye most. I'll shoot her first. I'll kill her before yer eyes."

Deliberately he leveled the gun at Felicity, and with a prayer on her lips she waited for death.

Then Moon made his last leap. With one sheer bound he threw himself on Macara, and the bullet meant for Felicity lodged somewhere in his chest. But he had gripped the revolver, and with his last strength he tore it from Macara's grasp. Putting it to the man's ear, he fired twice.

. . . . .

Steps on the veranda—hurried, frightened steps. Hillcrest with the doctor and two nurses. They almost tripped

over the body of Macara. Then they came on Felicity She was holding Moon's head in her lap.

"Too late," was all she said.

. . . . .

There is a green mound rounded by the sea. The ripples tinkle on the coral, the lagoon is crushed sapphire, from afar comes the bourdon of the reef.

Peace. . . . Solitude. . . .

Here, where Time dreams, they have buried Moon Here he lies in that sleep of sleeps, which, after all, may only be the gathering of a new strength, the preparing for a greater day.

THE END

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